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ABSTRACT

This document provides a compendium of evaluation research findings on first-year seminars at 50 institutions of higher education. Program reports are listed by type of institution: two-year institutions, small four-year institutions, mid-sized four-year institutions, and large four-year institutions. Each listing provides a brief description of the institution and its students, followed by a summary of the freshman seminar course or program, the evaluation design, and course or program outcomes. Contact information for each program is also provided. An index allows access by course or program outcomes in the following areas: academic achievement/grade point averages; credit hours attempted/completed; effects on faculty; financial outcomes; graduation rates; instructional strategies/models; retention; student adjustment/involvement; student satisfaction; student self assessment; evaluation of course components/resources; gender-linked findings; impact on academic advising; seminar grades as predictors; timing of the course; and utilization of services. (DB)

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Monograph Series
Number 25

The First-Year EXPERIENCE®

ED 433 742

Exploring the Evidence

Volume II

Reporting Outcomes of First-Year Seminars

Editors:
Betsy O. Barefoot, Editor-in-Chief
Carrie L. Warnock
Michael P. Dickinson
Sharon E. Richardson
Melissa R. Roberts

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University of South Carolina 1998

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Foreword

This is the second time that a compendium of outcomes and evidence confirms what those of us who have worked with student success courses have known all along. I first coordinated such a course in the late 1970s at a small Midwestern college. There was enthusiasm but very little evidence about the effect of a first-year seminar on students' experiences in higher education. I was so motivated by the results of teaching such a course that I wrote a textbook, established a consulting company, and began to assist educators in implementing similar courses. There was little or no formal research to substantiate that such courses were effective, but they were supported by the testimony of teachers who experienced significant behavior changes in students who participated.

Much of the data that support the effectiveness of first-year seminar courses has now been widely dispersed, and it is easier to convince educators of the viability of these courses because of this research. I want to thank the University of South Carolina and the work of Betsy Barefoot and others in the National Resource Center, under the direction of John Gardner, for this work.

More research can be done for evidence of the ways in which students benefit from first-year seminars. Current research shows that retention rates improve, grades improve, students' internal locus of control increases, participation in extracurricular activities and the use of campus services both increase, and students begin to clarify their short- and long-term goals. Most importantly, graduation rates increase.

A committed instructor and a shared institutional purpose of a course make possible the dramatic differences in the success of entry level college students. Bringing students together at least once per week for several weeks with the purpose of assisting them to be successful in college is the key to the seminar's success. In this structure, students feel they have permission to begin the inquiry about what they can do to be more successful. The format of the seminar may change, the books and other materials used may vary, but what remains the same is the conversation about what students can do to help themselves reach their academic goals.

Since 1980, the Consultants at College Survival and I have worked with thousands of educators in implementing, expanding, or improving student success courses. Following basic assessment procedures, which include pre-establishing course objectives and outcomes and then measuring progress toward those outcomes, is one of the keys to the effectiveness of such courses. The commitment to feedback and assessment has allowed courses to improve and has provided evidence necessary for other courses to get started.

The work I have done with students, faculty, and administrators involved with student success courses has been very rewarding. My appreciation goes out to all the people I have met through this work for the dedication and celebration they bring to higher education. It has been a wonderful gift for me to get letters from students who report their successes and how they will contribute to the world. The programs reviewed in this publication represent a small sampling of the creative and competent first-year seminar work being done throughout the United States.

David B. Ellis
October 1, 1998

Introduction

With the invaluable support of our corporate philanthropic partners, Student Success Programs of Houghton Mifflin Company, we are proud to contribute this publication to the enormous body of literature that comprises the American higher education assessment movement. This publication is unique in that it represents the very latest compendium of research findings on the most studied and assessed course genre in American higher education history: first-year seminars. Even though these courses date to 1882 and, according to our Center's 1997 survey of first-year seminars, are now found at slightly over 70% of the accredited undergraduate campuses in our country, there is a continuing demand for "evidence of effectiveness." The old adage of "show me, I'm from Missouri," would seem to apply to higher education policy makers, administrators, faculty, and course proposal reviewers in all 50 states!

This publication is an outgrowth of two important antecedents. The first is the *Journal of The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition*. Now in its 10th year, the *Journal* is the flagship serial publication of our Center and is the benchmark for scholarship in the study of the first-year seminar. The second antecedent is the first volume of *Exploring the Evidence*, published in 1993. In the early 1990s, we recognized the need to produce a practical compendium of first-year seminar research and outcomes. Our realization of the need for such a publication was shared by a special partner in the first-year seminar movement, David B. Ellis, author of *Becoming a Master Student* and founder of a private consulting firm, College Survival, Inc. Dave in his typically generous manner offered to underwrite the effort of our Center to collect whatever evidence we could find and to report that evidence to the higher education community. While this work was in progress, Dave sold the publishing assets of College Survival to the Houghton Mifflin Company which, in turn, maintained his previous commitment to support both the first volume and this expanded Volume II.

First-year/student success seminars are remarkably creative courses that are adaptable to a great variety of institutional settings, structures, and students. As this publication bears witness, these courses also frequently become a laboratory within which the campus may experiment with content and pedagogies designed to produce positive change in the attitudes and behaviors of first-year students.

As we have reviewed the reports included in this publication, we were again reminded that research is difficult, time consuming, and often risky. Conducting objective research on an intervention in which an institution and individuals have a personal, sometimes emotional, investment, is a bold and courageous act. But the willingness of educators to submit their programs and practices to statistical scrutiny generates invaluable information for all of us.

In this Volume II of *Exploring the Evidence*, even more so than in the first volume, you will find examples of research conducted at institutions of all sizes and varying missions and selectivity. These studies vary greatly in intent, in outcomes, and in levels of sophistication. But together, they paint a picture of a course that has already demonstrated its effectiveness and its further potential to teach students the attitudes, knowledge, and day-to-day behaviors that correlate not only with retention but, more importantly, with increased learning and personal success in college.

We hope that this monograph will inspire you, the readers, to do several things if you have not already done so. First of all, and most importantly, we hope that it will encourage you and your institution to conduct and/or refine your own specific studies of the effectiveness of first-year seminar courses. In turn, we hope you will make that information available to your colleagues. We also hope this monograph will encourage you to share this kind of information with us at the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. We look forward to the production of a Volume III of this important series and will rely on our readers to make that a reality.

Again, a final special thanks to David Ellis, the Consultants of College Survival, the Houghton Mifflin Company, and to our many contributors whose willingness to share their findings made this publication possible.

Betsy O. Barefoot
John N. Gardner
October 1, 1998

Two-Year Institutions

College of Lake County
Cosumnes River College
Dalton College
Floyd College
Oakton Community College
South Carolina High Schools
(University of South Carolina, Union)
Valencia Community College

Student Population 300 - 24,000

College of Lake County

The Institution and Its Students

The College of Lake County is a public two-year college with an enrollment of approximately 15,000 students. About 80% of the students attend part-time, and all students are commuters.

The Course

Becoming a Successful Student is a first-year seminar course offered since 1989. The course carries two hours of academic credit. Maximum section size is 20 students. Students are not required to take the course; it is open to all students, but most participants are first-year students. It is taught by full-time and part-time counselors, and approximately five sections are offered each term. Many of the students enrolled in the class are also taking remedial classes, and the primary course goal is to help students develop study skills and behaviors necessary to succeed in college.

Research Design

The research conducted is primarily post hoc research, looking at indicators of student performance and success and comparing students in the first-year seminar with all other first-year students. Research has been conducted studying both Fall 1994 and Fall 1996 cohorts.

Course Outcomes

Generally, students taking the first-year seminar are at higher risk academically than non-participants. Although their cumulative GPA tends to be lower than that of non-participants, these students complete more hours at the college from year to year.

For Fall 1996, the 33 students who participated in the Becoming a Successful Student course completed 74% of their attempted course hours as compared to 69% for the general population. Although the GPA for these at-risk students was lower than that of the general population (2.16 vs. 2.62), it was higher than the mean GPA of at-risk students who were not enrolled in the seminar. Generally at-risk students earn a mean GPA of below 2.0.

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The researchers conclude that students taking this course do about as well as other students. Since there is a larger percentage of high-risk students in the class, it appears to be meeting its purpose of providing these students needed academic preparation.

Cosumnes River College

The Institution and Its Students

Cosumnes River College (CRC) is a two-year public institution that enrolls approximately 14,000 students. It is a commuter campus located in south Sacramento, CA. A majority (56%) of CRC students are female, and 57% of the students represent an ethnic minority. The median age of students is 28.6 years, and about 30% of the student population attends evening classes.

The Course

In Spring 1993, Cosumnes River College began offering a college success course, entitled *Human/Career Development 2–College Success*, to local high school juniors and seniors for three units of transferable college credit. Adjunct faculty were hired to teach the course at neighboring high schools. All of these faculty members, many of whom were already employed as teachers at the schools where the course was offered, met minimum qualifications for teaching at the community college level. Each section of the course enrolled between 25 and 30 students.

The main goals of the course were to effect skill development and behavior modification in the following areas:

- Self-motivation and discipline
- Learning styles
- Campus programs/support services
- Study and life skills
- Interpersonal and creative skills
- Career life planning and decision-making

Classes were taught using a combination of lecture, small group discussion, dyad exercises, guest lecturers, student sharing of thoughts and experiences, and various assessments. Human/Career Development 2–College Success was a graded course; students were evaluated on the basis of out-of-class written assignments, quizzes, essay exams, objective exams, class attendance, class participation, and group assignments.

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Research Design

The study utilized a quasi-experimental design in which the treatment group was comprised of students who successfully completed the Human/Career Development 2–College Success course with a grade of 'C' or better between Spring 1993 and Fall 1995, graduated from high school, and enrolled in Cosumnes River College. Only the 38 students who met the above criteria, and for whom the researcher was able to obtain official college assessment scores, were included in the study analysis. A control group of CRC students, who were matched to members of the treatment group based on age, assessment scores, and high school graduation status, was also selected.

Dependent variables included for analysis were the following: first semester and cumulative GPA, number of first semester and cumulative college units completed, and cumulative number of college terms completed. Data were collected from students' official college transcripts and official assessment scores. Note that, while not detailed in this particular report, 10 of the 38 students in the treatment group also participated in an in-depth interview with the researcher about their experiences in the Human/Career Development 2 – College Success course.

Course Outcomes

Academic Performance and Retention

Data related to the three primary dependent variables were tested to discern whether any statistically significant differences emerged between those students who took the Human/Career Development 2–College Success course and those who had not taken this class in high school. Using a .05 alpha level as the threshold of significance, it was determined that no significant differences existed between the treatment and control group with regard to first semester GPA, cumulative GPA, number of first semester college units completed, and cumulative number of terms completed (although this last measure was significant at the .07 level).

Thus, the only variable for which a significant difference emerged between students in the treatment versus control group was the cumulative number of college units completed. In fact, as a group, students who took Human/Career Development 2–College Success in high school completed nearly twice as many cumulative college units as did the group of students who did not take this special course.

Dalton College

The Institution and Its Students

Dalton College, chartered in 1963, is a two-year unit of the University of Georgia system. As a commuter campus, Dalton primarily serves northwest Georgia and offers associate degree and certificate programs of study. The average student at Dalton is 25 years old.

The Course

Dalton College Studies 101 (DCS 101), a first-year seminar, has been in place since 1987. The course was developed to increase student retention and to improve programs of study at Dalton. When the course was first offered, it enrolled 104 students in six sections. The course enrollment grew each year proportionate to increases in the student population as a whole.

The seminar is offered in all four quarters of the academic year, but enrolls the largest numbers during the fall quarter. DCS 101, which is modeled on University 101 at the University of South Carolina, is an elective and meets twice each week. Students earn two quarter hours of academic credit for taking the course. Each instructor is free to modify the course, but there are common elements of group building, providing information about the college, teaching academic survival skills, and exploring personal development issues in all of the sections.

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Research Design*

The institution compared 405 first quarter DCS 101 enrollees with 500 randomly selected non-participants. After examining for background variables such as age, sex, and SAT scores, researchers found that the DCS 101 group and the comparison group were about the same in terms of the variables that frequently have an impact on success in college.

Course Outcomes

Hours Attempted and Quality Points

DCS 101 students attempted significantly more hours than non-DCS 101 students—24.9 versus 22.2 ($p < .01$). However, there was no significant difference in the number of quality points obtained (DCS 101 at 51.8, non-

DCS 101 at 48.9, NS). DCS 101 students were found to progress more rapidly through their chosen program of study than non-DCS 101 students.

Retention

During the fall following the students' first enrollment, 69.5% of DCS 101 students returned, compared with 55.8% of non-DCS 101 students [X^2 (1, N = 848)=16.35, $p < .001$]. During winter and/or spring of the following year, 68.7% of the DCS 101 students returned, compared with 50% of the non-DCS 101 students [X^2 (1, N = 848)=29.32, $p < .001$].

GPA and Hours Completed

After examining the academic records of students in the research and comparison groups who had completed nine quarters, researchers found that average GPAs did not vary between the two groups. The DCS 101 students achieved a 2.41, while the non-DCS students achieved a 2.42 GPA. However, total hours completed were significantly different in the two populations: DCS 101 students totalled 56.0 hours on average during their time at Dalton versus 44.6 hours for non-DCS 101 students ($p <$ .001).

Graduation Rates

Researchers found that 30.8% of the DCS 101 students met the 90 hour requirement for graduation as compared with 19.4% of the non-DCS 101 students [X^2 (1, N = 848)=14.46, $p < .001$].

The researchers conclude that taking DCS 101 at Dalton College has many positive effects but encourage caution in assuming a strict cause-and-effect relationship between this particular course and the student outcomes.

*This summary was drawn from the following research article:

Hoff, M., Cook, D., & Price, C. (1996). The first five years of freshman seminars at Dalton College: Student success and retention. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience & Students in Transition*, *8*(2), 33-42.

Floyd College

The Institution and Its Students

Floyd College is a public, two-year, commuter college located northwest of Atlanta in Rome, GA. It enrolls approximately 2,750 students (64% female, 36% male), nearly half of whom are nontraditional aged. The majority of the college's students are White (88%), with 12% of the student population representing minority groups (Black, Hispanic, American Indian, multiracial). Seventy-three percent of Floyd College students are required to enroll in learning support classes.

The Course

Floyd College Studies (FCST 1010) is a two-semester hour elective seminar. The course is letter graded and taught by faculty and staff who have participated in a special training retreat. Sections are limited to a maximum enrollment of 20. While the course is recommended for all students, it is especially geared towards new students.

Established eight years ago, the course provides students with techniques needed for college success. Emphasis is on study skills, stress management, exploration of college goals, and using college resources. The course also aids students in identifying career interests.

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Research Design*

In 1996, research was conducted to determine the impact of FCST 1010 on several measures of student success. The retention rate and GPA of similarly matched groups of FCST 1010 students and students who had not taken FCST 1010 over a three year period (Fall 1992 through Spring 1995) were compared. In addition to the comparison study, perception data were collected from students enrolled in the course.

Course Outcomes

Academic Achievement

An analysis of variance was used to compare the GPAs of the seminar participants and non-participants. Although no significant difference was found between the groups, the mean overall GPA for FCST 1010 students (2.68) was higher than that of non-participants (2.40) (Green, 1996).

To determine whether academic success in FCST 1010 could predict overall academic success at Floyd College, a Pearson product moment correlation test was used, and a significant correlation was found between FCST grade and subsequent GPA (Green, 1996). (The correlational value for this analysis was 0.441 which shows a positive correlation at the 0.05 level.)

Retention

The retention rates for both groups (participants and non-participants) were measured by the number of quarters each student was enrolled during the three year span. An analysis of variance was used to compare the groups and revealed that FCST 1010 students were less likely to drop out and were more likely to persist as measured by the number of credit hours earned.

The mean number of quarters for seminar students was 6.23; for non-seminar students, 4.71. The mean number of credit hours earned by FCST students during the three year period was 56.21, while the mean number for non-participants was only 37.11. Both differences are significant at the 0.05 level.

Student Perceptions

Students who participated in the class gave significantly positive responses to the course evaluation statements. Ninety-four percent (94%) of the respondents indicated that they would recommend the course to a friend. Self-reports also indicated that student stress level decreased whereas their self-rated scholastic competence increased during the quarter.

*Research conducted by:

Nihal Gunay, Ed.S., LPC
Dr. Margaret Davis, Professor of Mathematics
Phyllis N. Weatherly, M.Ed., LPC
Dr. James T. Green, Instructor at Darlington High School (Rome, GA)

Green, J. T. (1996). *Effectiveness of Floyd College Studies 101 on subsequent student success.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Alabama.

Oakton Community College

The Institution and Its Students

Oakton Community College is a two-year public institution with two campuses in Des Plaines, IL. The commuter school enrolls approximately 9,944 students (4,763 FTE). Approximately 36% of the students attend during the evening and another 8% attend on the weekends. The majority of students (56%) attend during the day. The average age of OCC students is 30; however, 53.2% of the student population is of traditional age (16-25).

The Course

College 101, the college success seminar, has been offered at OCC for nine years. Sections of the course are offered during all three academic terms and are limited to a maximum enrollment of 20 students. The course is taught by a variety of full- and part-time faculty, staff and administrators who have been trained or have experience teaching similar courses. While the faculty for the seminar come from a variety of disciplines, the course exists within the Department of Instructional Support Services, which provides a variety of services to aid students in achieving their academic goals.

The goal of College 101 is to increase students' chances for success in college. The seminar is designed to help students enhance their academic skills, interpersonal adjustments, cultural understanding, and career awareness. Topics addressed include introduction to college life, learning strategies and styles, self-assessment and awareness, setting college and career goals, values clarification, campus diversity, basic skills improvement, wellness, service learning, and computer literacy.

Research Design*

Students who had taken College 101 in regular spring and fall semesters during the academic years 1992-1995 were compared with a closely matched group of students who had not. Students were matched by age group, gender, course placements from assessment tests in reading, writing, and mathematics, and also by the first term in which the students were enrolled at the college. Comparisons were made of cumulative grade point average, cumulative credit earned through Fall 1996, and persistence as measured by last term enrolled.

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Course Outcomes

Grade Point Average

Students who successfully completed College 101 had a GPA of 2.43 as compared to the control group which had a mean of 2.05. The median GPA for the College 101 and the matched group were 2.43 and 2.15, respectively.

Cumulative Credit

Through Fall 1996, the College 101 group had completed an average of nearly 39 credits, as compared to only two-thirds as many (26 credits) for the control group that did not take College 101.

Persistence

Although students were perfectly matched on first term enrollment, comparisons of the last term of enrollment show that for each term through Spring 1995, the drop-out or stop-out rate was greater among students in the control group. In Spring 1997, 86 students in the College 101 group were still enrolled as compared to 59 students in the control group.

**Research conducted by Gene Atkin, Office of Research, Curriculum; and Planning, Oakton Community College.*

South Carolina High Schools

University of South Carolina, Union

The Setting

This research was conducted in two high schools in the Piedmont region of South Carolina: a mid-sized public high school with a minority student population of 42% and a small private academy with an all-White student population. Rising college-bound seniors at these institutions were invited to take an introductory college course at the University of South Carolina, Union—a local two-year campus of the University of South Carolina.

Research Design*

This was a quasi-experimental study designed to investigate the relationship between participation of college-bound high school seniors in a modified first-year seminar and (a) their levels of "anticipatory socialization" to college, (b) their college grade point averages, (c) their retention to the sophomore year, and (d) their overall adjustment to the collegiate environment. A population of 36 high school seniors was randomly assigned to participate in a *University 101* course or a course in *Government and International Studies (GINT)*. An additional comparison group of 15 college bound seniors was chosen. Members of the comparison group took neither the University 101 seminar nor the GINT course.

Anticipatory socialization levels were measured by a six-item survey administered at the conclusion of both University 101 and the GINT course. Adjustment to college was measured at the end of the first college semester. Grade point average and retention information was obtained at the end of the first college year from the registrars at the 14 South Carolina colleges and universities in which these students enrolled.

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Course Outcomes

Because of small sample sizes, results reported could not be analyzed for statistical significance.

Anticipatory Socialization and Adjustment to College

Students who participated in the University 101 seminar were more optimistic and excited about the prospect of going to college than were

students in the GINT class. They also reported quicker and easier adjustment at the end of the first college semester than GINT students or students in the control group.

Retention and Grade Point Averages

University 101 participants were more likely to be retained to the sophomore year than students in the GINT class or control group. However, students in the control group earned slightly higher first-year grade point averages than those in the two treatment groups.

*This summary was drawn from the following research article:

Buchanan, S. (1993). University 101 for high school students. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience*, 5(2), 49-68.

Valencia Community College

The Institution and Its Students

Valencia Community College is a two-year public institution serving over 24,000 students on four campuses. Founded in 1967, Valencia is now the fourth largest of 28 community colleges in the state of Florida. Over the past decade, college enrollment has significantly increased each year and Valencia has been recognized as the fastest growing of the five largest Florida community colleges.

Nearly 66% of Valencia's students are enrolled part-time. The student body is 43% male, 57% female, and has an average age of 26. The majority of students are Caucasian (65%) with Hispanic and African-American students comprising a large percent of the minority population (15% and 12%, respectively).

The Course

The *Student Success* course at Valencia Community College was implemented in 1987 and now has an annual enrollment of over 3,000 students. The course carries three credit hours and is intended for first-time college students and/or first-time Valencia students. It is a graded, college-level elective and is limited to no more than 25 students in each section. Special sections of the course are offered for specific student populations such as adult returners and honor students.

Full-time Student Success faculty, as well as full-time faculty and staff from other departments, teach the course. A small percentage of the course sections are taught by adjunct faculty. All faculty, regardless of status, participate in a one day training workshop before teaching the course and participate in ongoing two-hour workshops throughout the year. New faculty are assigned experienced faculty mentors to assist with the logistics of teaching the Student Success course for the first time.

The primary objective of the course is to help students develop a learning portfolio that includes educational planning, goal setting, journaling, and learning style assessment. Utilization of campus resources and implementation of successful study and life strategies are also emphasized.

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Research Design

For more than six years, Valencia Community College has tracked the re-enrollment, credit hours attempted, credit hours earned, and grade point averages of Student Success students. This information has been compared to the same information for similar cohorts of students not participating in the Student Success course. In testing proportions, researchers used the Tukey multiple comparison test of proportions. For the continuous measures (GPA, credit hours attempted, credit hours earned), Fisher's LSD for multiple post-hoc comparisons was used as an analysis of variance. The level of significance was .05.

Course Outcomes

Retention and Academic Achievement

Those students enrolled in the Student Success course, when compared to students who did not take the course, consistently returned at a 10% higher rate after one semester, one year, and two years. These students also attempted almost two credit hours more per semester than did the non-participants. Additionally, researchers found that Student Success students earned slightly higher GPAs after one semester than those students not enrolled in the course. The difference, however, was statistically insignificant during the following semesters.

Small Four-Year Institutions

Assumption College
Baptist Bible College
Bryant College
Castleton State College
Champlain College
Elon College
Keene State College
Loyola College in Maryland
Marietta College
Massachusetts College
of Liberal Arts
Missouri Western State College
Rockford College
United States Air Force Academy

Student Population 500 - 5,000

Assumption College

The Institution and Its Students

Assumption College is a private, four-year, liberal arts, Roman Catholic college located in Worcester, MA. The college has an undergraduate enrollment of 1,700; an additional 1,200 students are enrolled in continuing education and graduate programs. The College's undergraduate population is comprised primarily of traditional-aged, Roman Catholic, European-American students.

The Program

The *First-Year Experience Program* at Assumption College, in existence since Fall 1996, has as its primary objective the creation of a climate that increases the academic expectations and performance of academically underprepared students. Students identified as at-risk academically are assigned to separate sections in each of five core first-year courses. These sections are taught by full-time faculty members who also serve as mentors to the students outside the classrooms.

Designated sections of the following five courses are assigned to students in the First-Year Experience Program: English Composition, Western Civilization I and II, Introduction to Philosophy, and The Bible. These courses, selected because of their high degree of writing and verbal emphasis, are believed to be appropriate for the addition of a more intentional academic skills focus. Section size in the first-year experience sections of these courses is limited (17 in English Comp and 25 in the survey courses), and participating students are able to develop a close relationship with their professor and fellow students. The role of the faculty mentor includes spending one additional hour each week outside of class working with the students on the development of verbal, study, and note-taking skills.

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Research Design*

A study was undertaken in Fall 1997 to determine whether this program was effective in improving the retention, academic achievement, and satisfaction of participating students. The 49 students enrolled (30 females and 19 males) during the first program year (Class of 2000) were matched with a comparably sized control group from the previous year's student cohort (Class of 1999) by SAT score and high school class rank. An experimental design using a control group from the same cohort was

not used because the College did not want to deny any student access to the new First-Year Experience Program.

Academic achievement was determined by comparing cumulative GPA data after one year, and retention was defined as being enrolled at the College after one year. A student opinion survey was administered to both groups, and the results were used to compare levels of student satisfaction. This survey included items which measured students' perception of faculty, levels of peer interaction, and use of campus support services.

Program Outcomes

Retention

Research findings indicated that after one year, freshman-to-sophomore retention of students participating in the First-Year Program (Class of 2000) was 76% (total class retention was 82%); retention for the matched control group (Class of 1999) was 74% (total class retention was 84%).

Academic Achievement

After one year, the academic achievement of the treatment group from the Class of 2000 was 2.43 compared to 2.06 for the Class of 1999 control group. This difference was statistically significant at the .05 level ($t = 4.01$).

Student Satisfaction and Perception of Campus Life

Results of the Student Opinion Survey indicated that the treatment group responded more strongly than the control group that their academic life was a high priority, that they knew where to find help on campus, and that the faculty had helped them grow both personally and academically. The Class of 1999 control group responded more strongly that they enjoyed the social aspects of their first year and that they spent the majority of their time in social rather than academic activities.

**Research conducted and full report prepared by:*

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Elaine Whitlock, Smith College (Northampton, MA)
Kathleen VanEarden, University of Massachusetts (Amherst, MA)
Yaniris Fernandez, Hampshire College (Amherst, MA)

Baptist Bible College

The Institution and Its Students

Baptist Bible College (BBC) is a four-year institution with a distinctive biblical and historic Baptist curriculum. The college was founded in 1950 for the purpose of training students to serve as pastors, missionaries, and other Christian ministries. BBC currently enrolls 1,021 students, most of whom are of traditional age.

The Course

The freshman seminar course, entitled *Study Skills*, is a three-credit graded course required for all students. The course functions as part of BBC's Learning Center which also offers a variety of tutorial services. The specific mission of the course is to equip students to be skilled learners, critical thinkers, and effective communicators who also have strong ethical convictions.

Study Skills is taught by faculty who also serve as academic advisors. In this advising role, each instructor meets with his/her students at least once a month during the semester students are enrolled in the course.

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Course Outcomes

According to statistical measures, students who successfully complete Study Skills perform at a higher level on a number of outcomes measures, yielding benefits for themselves and for the institution.

Retention

Since implementing this course in 1991, freshman-to-sophomore return rates have increased approximately 10%.

Increased Graduation Rates

Graduation rates have increased approximately 6% since the inception of the Study Skills course.

Improved Grade Point Average

Students who participate in Study Skills after the first semester have been found to show a .38 improvement in college grade point average in

subsequent coursework. In addition, pre- and post-testing using the Nelson Denny reading comprehension test shows substantial improvement in reading comprehension, vocabulary, and reading rate following participation in the Study Skills course.

Increased Revenues

The increase in sophomore return rates and completion rates demonstrates that the money spent in the Learning Center budget increases retention and graduation rates. For every dollar invested in Study Skills, $5.10 is directly returned to Baptist Bible College in tuition dollars.

Study Skills receives consistent positive evaluations from students who rate highly both the course content and the relationship with the instructor/advisor.

Bryant College

The Institution and Its Students

Bryant College is a four-year, private business college in Smithfield, RI. Approximately 80% of the 2,500 full-time undergraduates at Bryant live on campus. All first-year students are scheduled for five courses each semester, and each course carries three credits.

The Course

Avenues to Success in College (ASC) is a non-credit first-year seminar which is offered for two hours each week during the first eight weeks of the semester. The course was developed by the Director of the Learning Center in conjunction with the Office of Planning and Institutional Research. Section size is limited to 15 students. Instructors (full-time and adjunct faculty and administrators) who volunteer to teach the seminar are trained in a two-day workshop, and each instructor is given significant autonomy in structuring his/her course section.

Course goals include the following:

- Improvement in academic skills, including studying, test taking, and time management
- Development of skills for living, such as stress and financial management, drug and alcohol awareness, responsible sexuality, and goal setting
- Knowledge of the institution, including library, computer, counseling, and career planning services
- Development of self-confidence and validation of each student as a valuable member of the campus community

Students both volunteered and were assigned to the course. However, those students who were assigned (n = 158) were selected, not because of academic deficiencies, but because of a class schedule that freed a block of time during the first eight weeks of the semester. The additional 133 volunteers responded to a mailed invitation sent to all students during the summer.

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Research Design*

Of the original 291 students who were either assigned or volunteered to take the course, only 144 remained in the program and can be considered "completers." Of these 144, about half came to every class meeting, according to self-report. The others came according to their interest in a particular class topic and personal availability.

Completers of the Avenues to Success in College (ASC) Program were compared with all other freshmen in terms of academic performance and numbers of credits completed. Both completers and non-completers are comparable with respect to entering SAT scores and high school grade point averages.

Course Outcomes

Grade Point Averages

ASC completers attained significantly higher grade point averages than other students during both spring and fall semesters. Fall semester completers achieved a 2.68 GPA compared to 2.53 for non-completers ($t = 2.36$, $p = .019$). Spring completers had a 2.69 GPA compared to non-completers at 2.56 ($t = 2.33$, $p = .02$).

Another statistic compared numbers of students in good academic standing (GPA of at least 2.0). Chi-square tests indicated that course completers were more likely to be in good academic standing than non-completers.

Credits Completed

Research also found that ASC completers dropped fewer courses than other freshmen, a result that was especially significant for students considered at high risk for academic difficulty.

Additional Findings

One interesting finding of the research on ASC was the fact that it was significantly more influential for male than for female students on every end point studied. Researchers hypothesize that women are better schooled in study techniques upon arrival at college than are the men, and therefore have less need of the program.

Another finding is that those students who volunteered profited more from ASC than those who were assigned. Again, the researchers speculate that this finding results from higher levels of motivation in the volunteer group.

*This summary was drawn from the following research article:

Odell, P. (1996). Avenues to success in college: A non-credit eight-week freshman seminar. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience & Students in Transition, 8*(2), 79-92.

Castleton State College

The Institution and Its Students

Located in rural Vermont, Castleton State College is a residential, four-year public institution with a limited number of graduate programs. The College enrolls 1,500 full-time and 200 part-time undergraduates. Approximately one-third of the students are commuters, and nearly two-thirds come from Vermont. The remainder are mainly from other New England and Mid-Atlantic states

The Course

In 1997, an expanded first-year seminar course replaced an earlier model of a one-credit, pass/fail seminar. The new seminar program is comprised of traditional 100-level courses from the various disciplines. These courses are graded, carry 3 - 4 credit hours, and are taught by faculty. The faculty are assisted by student life staff during a weekly "common hour" session focusing on campus resources, advising, and student developmental issues. Each faculty instructor also serves as the seminar students' academic advisor, and a peer mentor is assigned to each group. Seminar faculty are given a one course release (teaching three, rather than four, courses) in return for their extra advising duties. The seminar course is required for all students with fewer than 12 credit hours, and maximum section enrollment is 18 students. Some courses are linked to companion "cohort" courses enrolling the same group of students.

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Research Design

Mid-year assessment was conducted at the end of the Fall 1997 term. Data were analyzed comparing students in the 1997 cohort with students in the 1996 cohort who were participants in the previous one-credit pass/fail seminar. In addition, data on student and faculty perceptions of the new course were collected through surveys, focus group sessions, and interviews. Both the 1996 and 1997 student cohorts were comparable populations with respect to SAT scores, high school rank, and relevant questions from the College Student Inventory* (CSI). Program administrators acknowledge that the primary goals of the new program were to improve both faculty and student attitudes toward each other and the institution. Administrators are interested in the program's possible effects on student retention; however, improving retention was not the primary course goal.

Course Outcomes

Academic Performance and Retention

With respect to grade point average and retention from fall to spring semester, the new first-year seminar had no significant effect, either positive or negative, when compared with the previous seminar.

Final Observations

Student perceptions of the course and of the instructor/advisor were positive overall. Faculty also indicated satisfaction with their new academic advising responsibilities. The impact of the program on long-term retention remains unclear and will again be the subject of research in Fall 1998.

*The *College Student Inventory* is an assessment instrument designed by USAGroup Noel-Levitz, Inc., Iowa City, IA.

Champlain College

The Institution and Its Students

Champlain College is a private institution which offers two- and four-year degrees in 23 fields of study. Champlain was founded in 1878, and prior to 1991 it was a two-year institution. Currently, while students begin in the associates degree program, if their grade point average is 2.5 or above after one semester, they may enroll in the bachelor's program. Approximately 1,250 full-time and 850 part-time students attend Champlain. Slightly less than half of the students live in residence halls. Students come from 27 states and 19 foreign countries, and approximately 12% of the student body is over 24 years of age.

The Course

Freshman Focus, a first-year seminar, has been offered to Champlain students since Fall 1992. Freshman Focus carries one elective credit, but the class meets for two 50-minute sessions each week during the first semester. Students who have been recommended as leaders by their seminar faculty may also enroll in a follow-up, one-credit Leadership in Action class which is taught during the spring semester. A select group of students is also chosen for a one-credit Peer Mentoring class. Peer mentors assist instructors in the Freshman Focus classes.

Freshman Focus is housed administratively in the Arts and Sciences Division; however, the Leadership and Peer Mentoring courses are housed in Business Administration and earn students either one elective or one business credit. This program was initiated with external grant funds, but in 1995 the College committed to fund approximately 50% of the total cost. The remaining costs continue to be funded by outside grants.

Freshman Focus sections are limited to 24 students, but most sections have an enrollment of about 20. Sections are organized for students in similar majors, all of whom are co-enrolled in another content class with the same instructor. The seminar is taught by both full- and part-time faculty. The majority of part-timers are long-time faculty who are well connected at the college. The program director is a student services professional, and all instructors must have at least a master's degree. Currently, 230 students participate in 13 sections of Freshman Focus.

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Course objectives include the following:

- Improvement in study skills
- Discovery of campus resources and attendance at campus events
- Participation in community service
- Finding a sense of support
- Exploration of career options
- Exploration of values and decision making
- Awareness of learning and teaching styles
- Participation in study groups

Research Design

First-time, full-time students who participate in Freshman Focus are routinely compared with non-participants. Comparisons are made for the entire group of first-year students, but data are also analyzed for at-risk students (those enrolled in developmental English). Data indicate a dramatic increase in participation over five years: In 1992 only 22% of first-time students enrolled; in 1997 that percentage had grown to 58%. Additionally, in 1997, 95% of the students participating in Freshman Focus completed the class.

Course Outcomes

Retention

Over the past four and one half years (through Spring 1998), Freshman Focus students have demonstrated higher rates of retention. Currently the difference is approximately 11 percentage points.

Academic Skills

With the exception of the entering student cohort in 1992, Freshman Focus students who were the most academically at risk demonstrated higher grade point averages after two semesters than their non-Freshman Focus peers.

Utilization of Services

Consistent with the above findings, Freshman Focus students use the Student Resource Center and tutoring services far more frequently than the non-participants. The differences range from 15 to 27%. This difference also holds true for students who are the most at risk.

Other Outcomes

Other reported outcomes of the Freshman Focus program include the provision of a professional development opportunity for faculty and an improved working relationship between student services and academic affairs.

Elon College

The Institution and Its Students

Elon College is the third largest of North Carolina's private colleges and universities and is located in the piedmont area of the state. The four-year, coeducational, residential institution was founded in 1889 and is affiliated with the United Church of Christ. It offers both undergraduate and master's programs. Elon caters to a predominately traditional-aged student, and nearly 70% of its 3,700 students are from outside of North Carolina.

The Course

Elon 101 is a specially designed academic advising course/program that introduces first semester students to college life. The course meets weekly during the first semester and offers one semester hour of general college credit. Grading is evaluated on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory scale with a "U" affecting the GPA similarly to an "F." Sections are limited to 15 students and are co-taught by the students' academic advisor and a student teaching assistant. The faculty/staff instructor retains the role of academic advisor beyond the scope of the course and until a major has been declared by the student.

Serving as an extended orientation to college, the goals of the course are as follows:

- To assist students in the transition to college
- To help students in identifying resources for and barriers to success
- To assist students' understanding of the academic process
- To establish positive advisor-student relationships

Instructors are provided freedom in determining how they intend to meet the goals of the course. Cooking a meal at the advisor's home, conquering a ropes course, and analyzing and discussing the Myers/Briggs Type Indicator are common and popular class activities.

Elon 101 was originated in 1982 in response to student and faculty concerns about a lack of contact between faculty advisors and students. The program began with eight sections and has grown to include over 60 sections and a 90% participation rate by first-year students.

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Research Design*

Student retention and perception data were collected in order to evaluate the success of Elon 101. The most recent comparative retention data were collected in 1993. Since 1993, the increasing number of students who have elected to enroll in Elon 101 has eliminated the possibility of measuring a non-participant control group. The most recent student perception data were collected from the freshman class enrolled in the fall of 1997. Evaluations were distributed to students in their Elon 101 classes. Seventy-four percent of the evaluations were returned.

Course Outcomes

Retention

Over a three year period (1991-1993), the freshman-to-sophomore retention rate was, on average, ten percentage points higher for students who enrolled in Elon 101 as compared to those students who did not enroll.

Student Perceptions and Attitudes

Results of student evaluations indicated that 92% of Elon 101 students either strongly agreed or agreed that the course was successful in accomplishing the following goals:

- Orienting student to campus, college life, and campus programs
- Helping students to make friends and "feel at home" at Elon
- Identifying resources and barriers for success at Elon

Results from questions referring to the advisor and teaching assistants indicated that students agreed or strongly agreed at a rate of 96-98% that the advisor and teaching assistants were effective, supportive, and able to work as a team. Strengths of the course noted by the students included their feeling of comfort, the openness of discussions, and the advisor and teaching assistant. The course weaknesses were identified as unmotivated students, few interactive class activities, and a lack of group cohesion.

**This summary was based on a presentation entitled "Timeline to Success: Collaborating to Assist New Students in Transition," Freshman Year Experience Conference, February 20-24, 1998, Columbia, SC. Presenters were Becky Olive-Taylor; Rex Waters, Assistant Dean of Students; Melissa McAleer, Dalerie Hudson, and Elic Senter, Student Orientation Leaders.*

Keene State College

The Institution and Its Students

Keene State College, a publicly supported four-year institution, has a total enrollment of 4,800 full-time and part-time undergraduate and graduate students and offers more than 40 major programs of study, as well as individualized study, cooperative education, and international and national exchange opportunities. Approximately 25% of the student population is of non-traditional age; over 2,000 students live on campus, including 90% of the first-year class. While Keene State College attracts students from 29 states and 26 countries, 50% of the student population is from New Hampshire.

The Program

Keene State began developing its approach to the first-year experience in 1986. Rather than creating a separate College 101 course to help students make the transition to campus, traditional three-credit first-year courses, such as General Psychology and Fundamentals of Speech, were redesigned to encompass the three primary goals of the program:

1. To engage students actively in the learning process
2. To extend students' learning beyond the classroom
3. To enrich students' first semester experience at Keene State College

The First-Year Experience courses are designed to help students make a successful transition to college, both socially and academically.

First offered in Fall 1988, the courses are taught by full-time faculty with the assistance of staff or student associates. There is no standard section size because these are regular liberal arts courses, but most sections range from 20-40. A few sections, such as General Psychology, enroll up to 100 students but involve additional associates who assist the faculty.

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Research Design and Program Outcomes

Retention

Of the 731 first-year students at Keene State in the fall of 1988, 515 were enrolled in FYE classes. Analysis of persistence data on these students and their non-FYE colleagues yielded the following information: FYE students were far more likely to return for their second year than were non-FYE students ($X^2 = 7.67$, $p < .01$). Although this edge virtually disappeared by the time these students returned for their fourth year ($X^2 = 1.26$, NS), FYE students were more likely to persist after the traditional four years than their non-FYE colleagues: fifth year ($X^2 = 4.34$, $p < .05$); sixth year ($X^2 = 5.43$, $p < .02$).

Graduation

In addition, FYE students were far more likely to graduate in a timely manner than their non-FYE classmates. Twenty-nine percent of FYE students graduated within four years as compared to only 16% of non-FYE students ($X^2 = 9.86$, $p < .005$); 52% of the FYE students graduated within five and a half years, as compared to 35% of their non-FYE colleagues ($X^2 = 10.16$, $p < .002$).

To summarize, Keene State College's approach to first-year programming—incorporating transition strategies into traditional academic courses—has proven very successful in improving both student retention and overall success.

Longitudinal Retention Rates for FYE/Non-FYE Participants Entering in 1988

Fall	All Students (N=731) % retained	FYE Students (n=515) % retained	Non-FYE Students (n=216) % retained	p
1989	75%	80%	62%	<.01
1990	62%	65%	54%	<.10
1991	60%	62%	55%	NS
1992	57%	60%	48%	<.05
1993	51%	55%	42%	<.02

Graduation Rates (Bachelor's Degree) for FYE/Non-FYE Participants Entering in 1988

Date	All Students (N=731) % graduated	FYE Students (n=515) % graduated	Non-FYE Students (n=216) % graduated	p
5/92	25%	29%	16%	<.005
12/92	34%	39%	24%	<.002
5/93	43%	48%	31%	<.002
12/93	47%	52%	35%	<.002

Loyola College in Maryland

The Institution and Its Students

Established in 1852, Loyola College is a private, religiously affiliated, four-year, liberal arts institution. The college enrolls approximately 3,200 undergraduate students annually, 75% of whom live in the college residence halls. The school's academic offerings include both undergraduate and graduate degrees.

The Course

First Year Experience Seminar, offered since 1991, is a one-credit elective course. The seminar is graded on a pass/fail basis and does not count toward any graduation requirements. Each section is limited to 20 first-year students and is taught by a team comprised of a faculty member who serves as the students' academic advisor, an administrator from the Student Development division, and an upper-class student.

The goal of the seminar is to assist students with their transition to college. The course addresses social, emotional, and academic adjustments and attempts to connect students with a variety of persons on campus, including their academic advisor, administrators, and other students. Academic honesty, diversity, healthy lifestyles, and decision making are examples of issues addressed in the course. Four of the 12 sessions are devoted to off-campus activities and include outdoor adventure group training, community service, and group social events.

Research Design

The student records of the first three graduating classes (1995-1997) that enrolled in the first-year seminar were examined. Three groups of students were identified: students who enrolled in and completed the seminar, students who enrolled but withdrew from the seminar, and students who did not enroll in the seminar. A chi-square analysis of the differences in four year graduation rates of the three identified groups was performed.

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Course Outcomes

Four-Year Graduation Rates

Over the three year period (1995-1997), the four-year graduation rate of students who enrolled in and completed the seminar (81.4%) was significantly higher ($p < .001$) than that of students who enrolled in the seminar but subsequently withdrew (66.1%). While the four-year graduation rate of students who enrolled in and completed the seminar was also greater than that of students who did not enroll in the seminar (74.1%), the difference was not significant. Finally, there was not a significant difference in the graduation rates between the students who were not enrolled in the seminar and students who were enrolled but withdrew from the seminar.

Student Four-year Graduation Rates for the Classes of 1995, '96, and '97 Combined

		4-yr. graduation	%
Enrolled and Completed Seminar	387	315	81.4
Enrolled but Withdrew from Seminar	56	37	66.1
Not Enrolled in Seminar	1782	1320	74.1
Total	2225	1672	75.1

Marietta College

The Institution and Its Students

Marietta College is a four-year, private, coeducational liberal arts institution in southeastern Ohio with a population of approximately 1,100 mostly traditional-aged students. The overwhelming majority of Marietta's first-year students live on campus.

The Course

Since 1991, all Marietta students have been required to enroll in a three-semester hour freshman seminar. The course addresses the following content areas:

- Transition to college
- Study skills
- Group building
- Communication skills
- Values clarification
- Theme study

Seminar instructors serve as academic advisors for the students in their seminar sections and thus fulfill a mentoring role.

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Research Design*

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between gender and student outcomes in a freshman seminar course. Specifically, the study examined (a) the relationship between students' gender and their psychosocial development during the first semester, and (b) the effect of gender on the mentoring relationship between students and their freshman seminar instructors.

The population consisted of approximately 350 first-year students enrolled in the fall semester of 1993. A random sample (n = 180) was selected for participation in the study; equal numbers of men and women were randomly assigned to one of nine freshman seminar classes. Three

of the nine sections were taught by males, three by females, and three by a male/female team. All instructors selected were experienced seminar teachers with comparable performance evaluations.

The instrument used to gather data on students' psychosocial development was the Student Developmental Task and Lifestyle Inventory (SDTLI). This instrument, which was completed by the students both before and after the seminar course, measures three developmental tasks: Establishing and Clarifying Purpose, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, and Academic Autonomy.

Research Outcomes

Gender-linked findings

A comparison of pretest and posttest scores on the SDTLI yielded a number of interesting findings including the following:

Female students had significantly higher entering scores on the purpose and autonomy tasks than male students. There was no significant gender related difference on the mature relationships task. By the end of the semester, however, this pattern was reversed. Significant differences on purpose and autonomy tasks disappeared, (i.e., male scores increased, and female scores declined), and females scored significantly higher on the mature relationships task than males.

Post-hoc testing indicated that male students with male instructors had significantly lower scores on the relationships task than students in each of the other treatment groups. In addition, the male-male treatment group was the only group in the study for which the mean score on the mature relationships task did not increase over the course of the semester.

The researcher urges caution when interpreting these findings. She suggests replicating this study on other campuses and in studies using larger sample sizes.

*This summary was drawn from the following research article:

Blackhurst, A. (1995). The relationship between gender and student outcomes in a freshman orientation course. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience*, 7(2), 63-80.

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts

The Institution and Its Students

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts is a four-year state college with approximately 1,600 students, located in western Massachusetts. The college is 60-70% residential, about 70% of the students are traditional-aged, the vast majority are White, and most are residents of the state.

The Course

First Year Seminar was first offered in the fall of 1993 and carries three semester hours of academic credit. The course is required for all traditional-aged first-year students and is taught in 15 sections of approximately 18 students each. First Year Seminar is taught only by teaching faculty. Most instructors are full-time faculty; however, occasionally part-time instructors also teach the course. Primary course goals are (a) to aid students in the transition to college and (b) to improve first-to-second-year retention rates. Other goals include helping students succeed academically and socially, fostering tolerance for cultural diversity, and developing a sense of community.

Research Design

Since its first offering in 1993, First Year Seminar has been studied to determine whether seminar grades predict future student persistence and achievement. Seminar grades have been compared with SAT scores and high school rank or GPA to determine which most accurately predicts students who will persist to the sophomore year.

Research Outcomes

Use of Seminar Grades as a Predictor of Persistence

The relationship of First Year Seminar grades and persistence is "clear and unambiguous" for the last four student cohorts. Students earning low grades (a C+ or less) are less likely to persist to the sophomore year than students who earn a B- or better. The odds that students will persist increase as grades increase; B and A students as a group are 3.6 times as likely to persist as all others in aggregate. The difference in persistence between these two groups (above or below a C+) is significant at .001 and

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has very high statistical power (99% at $p = .01$). The same patterns occurred for persistence to the 3rd and 4th years, as well as graduation or persistence to the 5th year ($p < .001$ in all cases). For this institution, the use of seminar grades as a predictor of retention is clearly better than use of high school rank alone or together with SAT scores.

Seminar Grades as an Indicator of Motivation

Seminar grades correlate more strongly with achievement in the first semester and subsequent years than do high school rank and especially SAT scores. In addition, the seminar grade is more timely because the probable approximate final course grade is known by mid-semester for most students. For example, in the fall semester of 1997, about 70% of students with a midterm grade of F to C+ earned a final grade also in that range while about 80% of those with midterm grades of B- to A earned a final grade of B- or above.

Conclusions

This research supports the use of first-year seminar grades as predictors of student success. Therefore, they can be used as a factor in strategies to slow the drop out rate by identifying students with a higher risk of withdrawal.

Missouri Western State College

The Institution and Its Students

Missouri Western State College is a four-year public college located approximately one hour north of Kansas City. A full member of the State of Missouri system since 1977, the college offers one-year certificates, two-year associates and four-year bachelor's degrees in the liberal arts, sciences, and professional studies. MWSC enrolls approximately 5,000 students annually. Fifty percent of the freshmen live in the college residence halls. Seventy-two percent of the student population are traditional students.

The Course

College 101 was originally offered in 1988 as a two-credit course. In 1996, in response to efforts to enhance the mission of the college and promote student success and retention, the course was expanded to three credit hours and retitled *College 101: Freshman Seminar*. Approximately 60% of first-time freshmen elect to take the seminar each semester. The course is letter graded, and the credit hours are counted toward graduation. Each section is limited to a maximum enrollment of 22 students and is taught by a faculty member or professional staff person.

The primary goal of College 101: Freshman Seminar is to introduce the academic and personal aspects of college life. Course content includes instruction in use of campus resources, study skills, career exploration, personal development, college policies, and self-management skills. Ultimately, the course attempts to increase students' ability to understand and benefit from the college education process

Research Design

In the fall of 1997, a quasi-experimental design was developed to measure the effects of utilizing the College Student Inventory* (CSI) in certain sections of College 101: Freshman Seminar. The experimental group consisted of 115 students enrolled in six sections of College 101. The control group consisted of 248 students enrolled in the remaining 11 sections of the course. The College Student Inventory (CSI) was administered to the experimental group. The instructors met individually with their students to discuss the CSI reports. An independent *t*-test was used to examine the impact of the treatment on semester GPA and the number of credit hours attempted in the second semester. Non-parametric test

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Cramer's V was used to examine the impact of the treatment on semester retention and probation status.

Course Outcomes

Semester Retention

The experimental group revealed a higher semester retention rate (85.2%) than the control group (77.8%); however, these differences were not significant.

Semester GPA

The experimental group obtained a significantly higher (p = .009) semester GPA (2.54) compared with the control group (2.26).

Hours Attempted in Subsequent Semester

The experimental group attempted a greater number of hours in the spring of 1998 (13.61) than the control group (13.12). These differences were significant (p = .045).

Probation Status

The percentage of students placed on probationary status for the experimental group was 27%, while the percentage for the control group was 30.2%. The 3.2% difference was not significant.

Conclusions

The instructors felt that the CSI provides reliable and valid information on non-cognitive factors influencing student college success. The individualized reports not only facilitate communication with students, but also provided the impetus for instructors to modify course content to meet student needs more adequately.

*The *College Student Inventory* is an assessment instrument designed by USAGroup Noel-Levitz, Inc., Iowa City, IA.

Rockford College

The Institution and Its Students

Rockford College is a four-year, private, coeducational institution with a student population of 1,200. Seventy percent of Rockford's students are women, and 59% are traditional age. The college offers liberal arts, preprofessional and professional programs for degree-seeking students and for individuals seeking personal or career growth. Rockford is located midway between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River, 20 miles from the northern border of the state.

The Course

During Fall 1997, Rockford College piloted a freshman seminar course. During this first year of a three-year pilot program, the two semester hour, required seminar was taught in nine sections by faculty representing nine departments. Class size ranged from six to sixteen for a total of 130 students. In the future, section enrollment will be limited to 15 students.

The freshman seminar has three primary course goals:

- To provide Rockford College freshmen with an academic experience that will be challenging, and valuable in itself
- To prepare freshmen for their college careers in general by exposing them to the demands of serious reading, thinking, and writing, and by exposing them at the same time to various academic disciplines
- To promote bonds among them that will attach them to their classmates and to the college as a whole

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Research Design

Before and after the Fall 1997 seminar, instructors administered an instrument which asked students to self-assess their skills and behaviors that the course was designed to reinforce. The instrument consisted of questions which asked students to rate their abilities in the following areas on a 5-point Likert scale:

1) Participation in class discussions
2) Ability to write an in-class position paper
3) Taking time to come to a conclusion when answering questions
4) Listening to others in order to relate personal thoughts to their comments
5) Use of language that reflects a way of thinking
6) Ability to write and give a persuasive speech
7) Being a thinker who is inquisitive and curious
8) Identifying an author's arguments
9) Identifying an author's conclusions and supporting reasons
10) Defending personal beliefs during class discussions and writing exercises

For both pretest (n = 99) and posttest (n = 74), numerical responses were tallied and percentages were derived for each Likert response level.

Course Outcomes

Perceived Skill Level

Comparison of pre- and posttest percentages indicated that students gave themselves higher ratings on four items from the above list (#3, 5, 8, and 9), but rated themselves lower on six items (#1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 10). For the majority of the items, the perceived skill level differed by only a few percentage points. One item (#8), however, was rated substantially higher on the posttest (51% vs 65%) while another (#1) was rated considerably lower (54% vs. 41%). These differences were not tested for statistical significance.

Conclusions

Without further exploration of these findings, it is difficult to determine precisely their meaning. It is highly likely, however, that both lower and higher self assessment ratings following the first-year seminar are an indication of the students' more realistic understanding of their academic strengths and weaknesses. This understanding probably developed as a result of both the seminar and students' experiences in other first-year courses.

United States Air Force Academy

The Institution and Its Students

The United States Air Force Academy is a four-year, federal, residential service academy. Established in 1954 as the newest of the service academies, the USAF Academy offers 29 majors in engineering and sciences to approximately 4,000 cadets.

The Course

Learning Skills 102 is a two-credit hour, 42-lesson course currently offered to entering students during each fall semester. Sections of the course are taught by student services personnel and are limited in size to a maximum of twelve students each. Students identified as "at-risk" are required to take the course; however, a growing number of students are electing to take the course. The primary course goal is to provide students with a "Prescription for Academic Success." Learning Skills is taught by the Student Services Division, which is responsible for enhancing student success through the USAFA's academic advising, learning skills, and mentoring programs.

Learning Skills was first offered experimentally at the Academy in 1995 as a half-semester, 15-lesson course for at-risk students (LS101Z). The course was taught by student services and academic affairs personnel. Its success resulted in its expansion to a 21-lesson course (LS101) required for all at-risk students in 1996 and finally the current 42-lesson course (LS102).

Research Design

Research was conducted to compare the academic success of at-risk students for three consecutive years (first-year student cohorts in 1994, 1995, and 1996). The first-year GPAs of the most at-risk students, i.e., the bottom 41 of each class, were compared. Each cohort was provided a different level of learning skills support. The 1994 cohort was not offered a study skills course and was therefore considered the control group; the 1995 cohort was offered a 15- lesson, half-semester course (LS 101Z), and the 1996 cohort was offered a 21- lesson, semester course (LS101).

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Course Outcomes

Grade Point Average

The first-year GPA of the 41 most at-risk students enrolled in LS 101 (1996 cohort) was 2.41, as compared to 2.27 for LS 101Z (1995 cohort), and 1.78 for the control group (1994 cohort).

A comparison of all at-risk students indicated a similar trend in improvement. All at-risk cadets in the entering class of 1996 (n = 244) had an average GPA of 2.51 compared to a 2.36 for all at-risk students in the entering class of 1995 (n = 192).

Academic Probation

The number of students subsequently placed on probation also decreased over the three-year period. While 26 students in the control group (63.41%) were subsequently placed on academic probation, 10 (24.39%) and 9 (21.6%) students in LS101Z and LS101 respectively had probationary status. Comparisons of the total at-risk population for the entering classes of 1995 and 1996 also indicated a decline in numbers of students on probation from 1995 to 1996 (23.4% for 1995 students who took LS101Z and 20.1% for 1996 students who took LS101).

Academic Success

While probation statistics decreased over the three-year analysis, academic success statistics improved for the total at-risk populations. Twenty-eight (14.6%) of the students in the 1995 cohort had GPAs above 3.0, while 49 (20.1%) of the Class of 1996 also achieved GPAs above 3.0. Within the group of 41 most at-risk students over the three-year period, two students reached the 3.0 mark in 1994, five in 1995, and five again in 1996.

Mid-Sized

Four-Year Institutions

Central Connecticut State University
College of William and Mary (2)
Ferris State University
Idaho State University
Ithaca College
Kutztown University
Mankato State University
Montana State University-Bozeman (2)
North Dakota State University
Northern Michigan University
Old Dominion University
Saginaw Valley State University
Salisbury State University
University of Vermont
West Texas A&M University

Student Population 5,001 - 12,500

Central Connecticut State University

The Institution and Its Students

As the largest of four comprehensive universities within the Connecticut State University System, Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) enrolls approximately 6,000 full-time and nearly 6,000 part-time students. CCSU offers both undergraduate and master's programs.

Approximately 94% of CCSU's first-year students are 18 or 19 years of age. While 40% of these students commute to campus from nearby towns (many continuing to live with parents), 60% live in university residence halls. First-generation students comprise approximately 50% of the first-year class.

The Course

CCSU's *First-Year Experience Program* integrates first-year seminar information directly into the normal content of existing traditional introductory liberal arts courses that generally carry three hours of academic credit. This integration is accomplished through innovative changes in pedagogy and the use of cases, labs, and examples. The additional material includes study skills information, time management strategies, and information on personal development. Class enrollment is limited to 25 students or fewer, and the courses are taught by full-time faculty who are provided training and support.

For example, as would most Introduction to Geography courses, the FYE Geography course examines land use and what that reveals about its inhabitants. But the FYE course also selects the campus itself as the case study. This enables exploration into and discussion about campus life and community. The FYE Biology course examines life, growth, and the effects of evolutionary and environmental change using the lives of first-year students as a focus. The FYE Anthropology course uses the campus as a way to understand societal practices and relations, treating the campus as culture. In each course, new avenues of inquiry are added to important traditional disciplinary concepts and methods.

This program began in Fall 1994 with an initial pilot study of 180 students (17% of the entering first-year class) taught in five different courses. During each subsequent year, the program has been expanded, and starting with Fall 1998, all incoming students (with fewer than 15 credits) will be required to take one of 48 FYE classes in 18 different disciplines.

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Research Design* and Course Outcomes

Retention

In comparing freshman-to-sophomore retention of participants and non-participants, program administrators found a three to six percentage point difference, favoring participants in the FYE courses.

Student perceptions and attitudes

During the first three years of the program (1995-1997) research was conducted comparing FYE students with a control group of first-year students who were not enrolled in the program on a number of variables. During all years, FYE students have been more likely to report the following:

- Satisfaction with small classes
- A personal relationship with a faculty member
- The perception that professors wanted them to succeed
- Greater exposure to academic, library, and computer skills

One interesting finding is that the gap between the attitudes and experiences of participants in the FYE courses and non-participants has narrowed each year as faculty teaching non-FYE sections have adopted some of the teaching techniques described by their colleagues.

Cost/benefit findings

Program administrators have determined that the cost of both instruction for the smaller classes and faculty workshops is more than covered by the increase in student retention. In addition, the program has had a positive "halo" effect on other courses, other faculty, and student enthusiasm.

**Research conducted and full report prepared by Doug Engwall, Psychology Department, Central Connecticut State University.*

College of William and Mary (1)

The Institution and Its Students

The College of William and Mary is a public, four-year institution located in Williamsburg, VA. William and Mary is one of a small number of American institutions known as "public ivies" because of their selective admissions standards and strong liberal arts curriculum. The College enrolls approximately 7,600 students, the majority of whom are of traditional age.

Freshman Seminar Program

William and Mary, like many other institutions, has seen the benefit of creating different first-year seminars to address the needs of different groups of students. The variable-content freshman seminar courses that are the subject of this research are required and taught by faculty across the curriculum. Research on another William and Mary seminar is also described in this publication.

Each freshman seminar section is limited to 15 students and focuses on a different academic topic. All sections, however, have the following common objectives:

- To help students develop their critical thinking and independent learning abilities
- To provide students with an active small-class experience
- To give students opportunities for discussion, writing, and other modes of expression appropriate to the subject matter of the course

A comprehensive faculty development program has been offered to help faculty develop pedagogies that emphasize oral communication and writing within the course. One of the stated freshman seminar goals is that 50% of class time will be devoted to student participation.

Research Design*

Research was conducted to examine the impact of a nine-session faculty development workshop (which met over seven months) entitled "Freshman Seminars: Making Them Work" on both the behaviors and

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perceptions of faculty and students with regard to classroom oral communication and learning. Data from seminar faculty meetings, an on-going discussion list, evaluation responses, interviews, surveys, and audio recordings of classes were used to compare the seminar faculty who had and had not participated in the training and their seminar students. This comprehensive dissertation research produced many interesting findings, some of which are discussed in this summary.

Program Outcomes

Patterns of Classroom Communication

In both treatment and comparative groups "faculty talk" occupied more time than "student talk." However, faculty who participated in the faculty development training (treatment group) talked less in class, as compared to their students, than faculty in the comparative group. These findings were not significant at the 5% level, although qualitative analysis clearly demonstrates more "quality" talk in the treatment group courses.

When treatment and comparative groups were pooled, instructors (overall) talked during 50.9% of class time and students talked during 37.1% of class time. The remaining 22% of time contained no talking.

Significant Research Findings

The faculty development program did result in the use of many teaching strategies to improve students skills in oral communication.

Faculty who participated in the faculty development training reported using a larger, more varied group of strategies than did non-participants.

Students taught by faculty workshop participants described their classrooms as being characterized by more general types of instructional strategies in more combinations and contexts than did students taught by faculty in the comparative group.

Students taught by faculty in the treatment group also produced higher overall course ratings than those taught by faculty in the comparative group.

*This summarizes the following dissertation:

Burk, T. L. (1997). *Faculty instructional development and oral communication in freshman seminars at the College of William and Mary*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, College of William and Mary.

College of William and Mary (2)

The Institution and Its Students

The College of William and Mary is a public, four-year institution located in Williamsburg, VA. William and Mary is one of a small number of American institutions known as "public ivies" because of their selective admissions standards and strong liberal arts curriculum. The College enrolls approximately 7,600 students, the majority of whom are of traditional age.

Students who were the subject of this research were 72 high-risk students, 71 of whom were African-American. These students were admitted with the condition that they would participate in a range of support services including a year-long, two credit orientation seminar.

The Course

The College of William and Mary is one of a growing number of institutions offering more than one type of first-year seminar in order to meet the needs of different student groups. A second summary in this publication describes research conducted at William and Mary on a multi-section variable-content seminar program for all students.

The seminar course which is the subject of this research was offered to 72 students who were randomly assigned to one of four sections. Two sections (treatment group) used the Deliberate Psychological Education (DPE) instructional model which is designed to promote cognitive growth as well as academic and social skill development. Instructional strategies include active practice in problem solving, role-playing experiences, and interactive exchanges with peers. The remaining two sections (control group) used a traditional lecture-style format to promote academic and social skill development. A pair of instructors was assigned to each section who were mixed by gender and race.

Content covered in each of the four sections included academic skills, effective personal strategies for dealing with academic difficulty, campus resources, and a variety of social issues. Each section covered identical content; however, the instructional process differed dramatically between treatment and control groups.

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Research Design*

This research was designed to compare the effectiveness of the Deliberate Psychological Education (DPE) instructional model—a model which emphasizes various active learning and group interaction strategies—to a more traditional lecture style of instruction. The Learning Context Questionnaire (LCQ) and the Paragraph Completion Method (PCM) were used to assess students' psychological development along intellectual and conceptual domains respectively. Instruments were administered before and at the completion of the course.

The Survey of Study Habits and Attitudes (SSHA) measured pre- and post-treatment changes in their study skills, motivation for studying, and attitudes toward certain scholastic activities. Additional data were drawn from student evaluations and from analysis of GPAs as compared to a similar group of first-year students who, for various reasons, were not required to participate in the support program.

Research Outcomes

Psychological Development

Students in the treatment sections scored significantly higher on the Paragraph Completion Method (PCM) ($t = 2.129$, $p < .05$). On the Learning Context Questionnaire, the treatment group experienced positive change from pretest to posttest, but it was not significant at the .05 level.

Study Habits and Attitudes

Pre- and posttest measures of study habits indicated significant improvement for the treatment group and only slight improvement in the skills of control participants. However, attitudes toward college declined for both groups and was greater for the treatment group.

Grade Point Averages and Course Satisfaction

Results on these two measures were mixed. Although students in treatment groups were significantly more satisfied with the orientation course than those in control groups ($t = 2.263$, $p < .05$), anticipated differences in GPAs were not found. Students in treatment groups achieved slightly higher GPAs than those in control groups. Both treatment and control participants achieved slightly higher mean GPAs than students in a college-wide comparison group. However neither measure of GPA difference was statistically significant.

*This summary was drawn from the following research article:

McAdams, C. R., & Foster, V. A. (1998). Promoting the development of high-risk college students through a deliberate psychological education-based freshman orientation course. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience & Students in Transition, 10*(1), 51-72.

Ferris State University

The Institution and Its Students

Ferris State University (FSU) is a medium-sized, public, four-year institution located in west central Michigan. Founded in 1884, the institution focuses on professional, technical, and vocational fields. FSU enrolls approximately 10,500 students, 25% of whom are non-traditional students.

The Course

Ferris State University offers both a semester and a year-long version of its first-year seminar. *Ferris State University Seminar (FSUS) 100* is independently available during the fall, winter, and summer terms, while *FSUS 101* is available in the winter only and builds upon the fall session of FSUS 100. Approximately 60% of the academic programs at FSU require one or two semesters of the seminar. Both courses are taught predominately by faculty, receive one academic credit, and have a limited section enrollment of 20 students.

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Research Design

In 1996 and 1997, the first-year to second-year retention rate of students who enrolled in the FSUS 100 course was compared with the retention rate of all first-year students who did not enroll in the seminar. In 1997, the retention rate of students who took FSUS 100 and FSUS 101 were also compared.

Course Outcomes

Retention

Analysis of the 1996 first-year to second-year retention rates indicated that students who enrolled in FSUS 100 had a retention rate five percent better than students who did not enroll in the seminar. The retention rate of first-year students that enrolled in the seminar was 61% compared to 56% for students who did not enroll.

In 1997, the first-year to second-year retention rates of three groups were analyzed. Students who did not enroll in a first-year seminar had a

58.6% retention rate, students who enrolled in FSUS 100 had a 60% retention rate, and students who enrolled in FSUS 100 and 101 had a 70% retention rate. Thus, while the retention difference between FSUS 100 enrollees and non-enrollees was minimal (1.4%), the first-year to second-year retention rate for students who enrolled in FSUS 100 and 101 was 11.4% greater than students who were not enrolled in the seminars and 10% greater than students who enrolled for only one semester.

Idaho State University

The Institution and Its Students

Idaho State University, which has an enrollment of slightly more than 12,000 students, is a Doctoral II institution. The University serves southeast Idaho residents with a variety of educational opportunities from community college services to doctoral programs. Relatively few students reside on campus; most commute from home or live in rental housing in the local community. A large majority of Idaho State's freshmen are traditional-aged students from the surrounding area.

The Course

Idaho State University's *First-Year Seminar Program* provides an introduction to the nature of higher education, as well as a general orientation to the functions of the University. The program's primary goals are to help first-year students adjust to the University, develop a better understanding of the learning process, and acquire essential academic survival skills.

For several years after the First-Year Seminar Program was introduced in 1990, classes were taught exclusively by student affairs professionals at the University and designed primarily to serve at-risk students. However, several important changes were made to the program in Fall 1997:

- The overall number of seminar sections offered increased.
- Student affairs professionals teamed with faculty members to teach most sections of the course.
- Greater efforts were put forth to enroll academically prepared students, in addition to at-risk students, in the seminar.

A total of 22 sections of the First-Year Seminar (FYS) were offered in Fall 1997. Although class size is limited to 25 students per section, class enrollment for the fall semester averaged 21 students. Note that three sections of the seminar were included as part of a newly established learning community program at Idaho State known as CLASS (Clustered Learning for Academic Student Success). The FYS course carries the weight of one academic credit.

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Research Design*

The quantitative research conducted on FYS course outcomes at Idaho State focused on three measures of student success: retention, end-of-first-term GPA, and percentage of attempted credits passed. Results along these three dimensions of success were compared among students who had a predicted first semester GPA of at least 2.0 and those whose predicted GPA was below the 2.0 mark. Students' first semester GPAs are calculated according to a formula based on high school GPA and ACT scores. Student evaluations of the FYS course were also used as a means of outcomes assessment. A .05 level of confidence was used as the threshold of statistical significance.

Course Outcomes

Among students with a predicted GPA below 2.0, there were no significant differences found with regard to any of the student success variables measured. In contrast, the following significant differences emerged among students with a predicted first semester GPA of 2.0 or higher. High school GPA was used as a covariate in all analyses.

Retention

Students enrolled in CLASS and FYS and those enrolled in CLASS only were more likely than those not enrolled in either program to persist to their second semester. Enrollment in FYS, exclusively, did not have a statistically significant effect on retention. It is the third semester, however, that is the time of greatest loss, especially for A and B students.

Academic Achievement

Students enrolled in CLASS only, FYS only, or both programs earned significantly higher first semester GPAs than did those who were not involved with either program. Students enrolled in CLASS only or in both programs also passed a significantly larger percentage of their attempted credits than did those who were not involved with an intervention program.

Student Satisfaction

In their evaluation of the FYS course, a vast majority of students said they would recommend the course to entering students at the University, and nearly two-thirds suggest that the course be required. Students cited the following as strengths of the course:

- Instructors
- Class atmosphere
- Opportunity to meet other students
- Class discussions
- Specific content areas (e.g., campus resources, time management)

In terms of what they would change about the class, students suggest inclusion of more information on computer and library skills and greater class interaction and involvement.

**Research conducted by Dr. Jonathan Lawson, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dr. Barbara Lawrence, Director of Institutional Research.*

Ithaca College

The Institution and Its Students

Ithaca College is a selective four-year private institution that enrolls approximately 5,500 students. The school's residential campus is located in Ithaca, NY.

The Course

The original freshman seminar at Ithaca College, *First-Year Seminar in Management*, was established in the institution's undergraduate School of Business in Fall 1991. Initially, the seminar was offered exclusively to Management majors as a means of combating increasing attrition rates evident within that particular program of study. Soon after its introduction as an "experimental" course, the seminar became a one-credit requirement for all Management majors. As of Fall 1998, the *First-Year Seminar in Business* is required of all freshmen entering Ithaca's School of Business, regardless of their discipline concentration.

The course is designed to introduce students to a discipline-based curriculum relevant to their major, as well as tackle issues relevant to all first-year students (e.g., time management, diversity). A unique aspect of the course is the way in which these two elements—discipline-based instruction and guidance regarding more general issues—are combined. For example, organizational decision theory was chosen as the discipline-based theme of the course. Using this as a contextual framework, students were assigned to join or shadow a campus club and report on its decision-making style. Thus, students became more familiar with both an aspect of management theory and an aspect of campus life.

Enrollment in the seminar has, thus far, been limited to about 15 students per section. Students in each section of the first-year seminar are also co-registered in a common section of a required three-credit macroeconomics course.

Research Design*

Perceived outcomes of the first-year seminar were ascertained through anecdotal feedback, anonymous student course evaluations, and retention data that is maintained by the College's enrollment management staff.

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Course Outcomes

The First-Year Seminar in Management seems to have had the following outcomes:

Retention

Participation in the first-year seminar seems to have a positive impact on retention. Freshman-to-sophomore retention among Management majors jumped from 66.7% for the 1990 entering class to 83.5% for the 1991 entering class. Introduction of the seminar was credited for the improvement since it was the only evident environmental change that year; that is, no other modifications had been made to the curriculum, no notable changes had occurred relevant to the overall campus experience, and students were demographically similar to their predecessors.

Other Outcomes

The seminar gave students a solid preview of what to expect from their intended academic major and exposed students to curricular themes that they would not ordinarily be exposed to before taking upper level courses in the School of Business.

Students felt the course effectively linked discipline-based theory with aspects of their lives outside of the classroom.

Students enjoyed getting to know and sharing multiple classes with the same group of peers; in fact, students in one section of the first-year seminar actually pre-registered for a common section of a microeconomics course for the following spring semester.

**This summarizes a full report of research conducted by Dr. Lifton. The report, entitled "Stanching Business School Attrition with a First-Year Seminar in Management," is available from Dr. Lifton upon request.*

Kutztown University

The Institution and Its Students

Kutztown University is a public four-year university located in Kutztown, PA. The undergraduate student population of 7,000 students is predominately of traditional age and Caucasian. Approximately 40% of these students live on campus. First generation college students account for 62% of the population, and approximately 30% of all freshmen have been designated as academically underprepared.

The Course

The *Student Support Services Program (SSSP) Freshman Colloquium* was introduced at Kutztown in the fall of 1994 and is mandatory for all students accepted to the SSSP. These students are at high risk for poor academic performance as determined by a number of factors. The SSSP freshman class of 1994 had the following demographic characteristics:

- 88% were first-generation college students
- 23% were students of color
- 58% were conditionally admitted to the University and required developmental courses
- 35% of the students reported physical/learning disabilities

The Freshman Colloquium is a non-credit course that meets one hour a week for ten weeks during the fall semester. Each class section consists of 15-17 students and is taught by a faculty member in the SSSP. The colloquium develops the writing, reading, reasoning, and study skills necessary to engage in the intellectual pursuits at Kutztown University.

Colloquium objectives include the following:

- Assist students in understanding the benefits of higher education
- Assist students in understanding their role and responsibilities
- Introduce the many resources available on campus
- Focus students' attention and energy on attaining their academic and personal goals

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- Increase students' identification with Kutztown University
- Equip students with the tools to effectively manage the university system
- Develop an appreciation for cultural diversity
- Help students become self-sufficient and independent as college learners

Research Design

In the fall of 1994, the Student Support Services Program began tracking 83 students assigned to the SSSP Freshman Colloquium. Of those assigned, a number of students withdrew from the SSSP or refused to attend a non-credit bearing course. The researchers compared the retention rates and grade point averages of these non-participants with the retention and grades of those who attended the colloquium. Participants with various levels of attendance were also compared.

Researchers looked at several variables (first-generation status, race, disability status, academic motivation level, and adjusted gross income) to determine whether they could explain the academic achievement and persistence levels of the colloquium attendees. No significant findings appeared for any of the variables. The colloquium seems to be equally effective for all students admitted to the Student Support Services Program at Kutztown.

Course Outcomes

Retention

Students who chose not to attend the colloquium had a 58% retention rate from the first to the second year. Those with regular attendance were retained at a rate of 97%. Ninety-four percent of the students who attended 6-7 of the sessions stayed for their second year as did 87% of the students who attended 1-5 sessions.

Significant differences were also found after the second and third years. Thirty-two percent and 27% of non-participants were retained after their sophomore and junior years respectively. Of those who attended 1-5 colloquium sessions, 47% were retained after the second year and 20% after the third. Drastic differences can be seen when these students with poor or no attendance are compared to those with higher attendance records. Seventy-eight percent of 6-7 session attendees and 77% of students who attended 8-10 sessions were still enrolled after the second year. After the third year, both attendance groups had a retention rate of 61%.

Academic Achievement

Each semester through Fall 1996, the overall and semester grade point averages of students who attended 8-10 colloquium sessions were higher than the grade point averages of those who attended less often. First semester GPA for non-attendees was 0.99 as compared to 1.84 for those students who attended 6-7 times and 2.34 for those who attended the Freshman Colloquium 8-10 times. From semester to semester, grades for all attendance groups continued to rise; however, the groups with better attendance records consistently received significantly higher grades.

Mankato State University

The Institution and Its Students

Mankato State University is a four-year, public institution located 85 miles southwest of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Founded in 1866 as a teacher training institution, the University encompasses six undergraduate colleges and one graduate college. Approximately 12,500 students are enrolled at the University, and 83% of the students are from Minnesota.

The Course/Program

The First Year Experience Program at Mankato, in its five-year history, has evolved from a one section seminar into a two course learning group.

The *First Year Seminar (FYS)* component of the learning group is a course developed around the theme of critical thinking. Established in the spring of 1993 in response to declining enrollments, the one-section, one-credit pilot course has developed into a two-credit course with 34 sections offered in the fall of 1997.

In 1995, the option of the learning group concept was adopted into the course. In addition to enrolling in the First Year Seminar, students can register for common sections of Composition 101 (i.e., half of the students' classmates in their FYS section will be in their Composition 101 section) and attend four workshops during the quarter on the topics of test anxiety, note-taking, text reading, and time management.

Research Design

The effects of the seminar on student retention and GPA were examined for first-year students enrolled in the fall of 1995 and 1996. Three groups of students were analyzed: students in a learning group, students enrolled in a seminar only, and students in neither the learning group nor the seminar. Appropriate chi square, one-way analysis of variance, and regression analysis were performed.

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Program Outcomes

Retention

Over one- and two-year analyses, the learning group had significant effects on retention, while the seminar-only group had higher, but not significantly different, retention rates than the control group.

One-year analysis of first- to second-year retention data for 1995-1996 and 1996-1997 indicated that students in the learning group had a retention rate of 83.1% and 80.3%, respectively, compared to the seminar group with 75.3% and 79.1% and the control group (students in neither the learning group nor the seminar) with 71.1% and 71.9%. The differences between the learning group and the control group were significant in 1996 ($p < .05$) and 1997 ($p < .01$). The seminar group had lower retention than the learning group and higher retention rates than the control group but no significant differences were discovered.

A two-year follow-up of the 1995 cohort also indicated a significant difference ($p < .01$) in retention between the learning group (70.3%) and the control group (56.2%). The retention rate of the seminar group (62.5%) was, again, in the middle and was not significantly different.

Grade Point Averages

GPA data should be reviewed with the recognition that the students in the learning group and seminar-only group had lower high school rank and lower ACT scores than those not enrolled in the FYS. Differences in GPA may be underestimates of the true differences that could be expected.

One- and two-year analyses of students' GPAs indicated that the learning group had significant effects on GPA, while no differences were discovered between the seminar-only and control groups.

First- to second-year GPA data for 1995-1996 and 1996-1997 indicated that students in the learning group had a GPA of 2.87 and 2.84, respectively, compared to the seminar group with 2.70 and 2.66, and the control group with 2.66 and 2.72. Significant differences ($p < .05$) between the learning group and the control group were found. The two-year follow up of the 1995 cohort also indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) in GPA between the learning group (2.84) and the control group (2.65). After neither a one- nor a two-year follow-up were significant differences discovered between the seminar-only and control groups.

Montana State University-Bozeman (1)

The Institution and Its Students

Montana State University-Bozeman (MSU), a public land-grant institution, enrolls approximately 11,600 students. The vast majority of students are Montana residents, full-time, and are of traditional college age. American Indians, the largest minority on campus, constitute about 2% of the student population. The first-year class averages 2,000 students.

The Course (College Seminar 101)

Montana State University, like many other institutions, has seen the benefit of creating different first-year seminars to address the needs of different groups of students. This course, *College Seminar 101*, is only one of three distinct seminars offered on the Bozeman campus. Research on another MSU seminar is also described in this publication.

The College Seminar (CLS 101) is a multi-disciplinary seminar for first-year students that is offered by the College of Letters and Science. The course carries three hours of academic credit and is taught by senior faculty members who are paired with upper division student teaching fellows. The course features readings from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, and it emphasizes communication, thinking, active class participation, and learning through inquiry and exploration. Readings include:

Plato, *Apology and Crito*
Galileo, *Letter to the Grand Duchess Christina*
Jonathan Weiner, *The Beak of the Finch*
Peter Kramer, *Listening to Prozac*
Myra and David Sadker, *Failing at Fairness*
Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations*
Leslie Silko, *Ceremony*

Course participants meet twice per week in individual seminar sections of 15 students and once per week for a common lecture hour.

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Research Design

During the Fall 1997 semester, seventeen faculty who had taught the College Seminar were surveyed to determine the extent to which they enjoyed teaching a multi-disciplinary course. The survey also gauged

whether teaching the seminar influenced faculty perceptions of first-year students and/or the pedagogies faculty used in other courses. Fourteen faculty members participated in this research.

Course Outcomes

Though the extremely small sample size necessitates that the results be regarded as directional rather than as statistically meaningful, some clear and interesting response patterns emerge.

Faculty Satisfaction

First, over 90% of the faculty surveyed enjoyed teaching the course, working with colleagues in other disciplines, and reading books that they would not have otherwise read.

Faculty Perceptions of First-Year Students

In terms of the effect teaching the course had on faculty perceptions of first-year students, a majority of faculty say teaching the seminar leads them to believe that freshmen have the following characteristics:

- They are capable of doing more intellectually challenging work than that which is usually expected of them in other freshman courses.
- They perform at a higher intellectual level than the faculty initially expected.
- They possess better critical thinking skills than the faculty initially expected.

Influence on Faculty Members' Teaching

Ten faculty members say that teaching the College Seminar influenced the way in which they teach other courses. The most common adjustments made, each of which was cited by seven of ten respondents, were that faculty listen more effectively to student comments and ask more challenging questions of their students.

Montana State University-Bozeman (2)

The Institution and Its Students

Montana State University-Bozeman (MSU), a public land-grant institution, enrolls approximately 11,600 students. The vast majority of students are Montana residents, full-time, and are of traditional college age. American Indians, the largest minority on campus, constitute about 2% of the student population. The first-year class averages 2,000 students.

The Course (General Studies 101V)

Montana State University, like many other institutions, has seen the benefit of creating different first-year seminars to address the needs of different groups of students. This course, *General Studies 101V*, is only one of three distinct seminars offered on the Bozeman campus. Research on another MSU seminar is also described in this publication.

The GENS 101V Freshman Seminar course is offered through the General Studies program and is required of all undeclared students (as of Fall 1997). The course carries three academic credits and fulfills the verbal core requirement for the University. The verbal core is integrated into the course through speaking assignments that address the students' exploration of academic majors and careers.

The freshman seminar was piloted eight years ago to help General Studies students adapt to and succeed at MSU. The course aims to:

- Address general transitional needs of first-year students
- Help students explore various academic majors and career opportunities
- Acclimate students to the intellectual challenges of a university education

During the Fall 1997 semester, sections of 18 students were facilitated by an MSU staff member (professionals, adjunct faculty, and graduate students) and an upper division teaching fellow. Peer leaders are an integral part of the course, developing the wellness curriculum and sharing their experiences and insights with first-year students.

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Course Outcomes

Retention

Retention rates for undeclared students who take the GENS 101V Freshman Seminar are consistent with or surpass those of declared students at MSU. The differences, however, are not statistically significant at the .05 level of confidence. Additionally, retention rates for students who complete the Freshman Seminar are consistently higher than those for undeclared students who were unable to take the course.

Fall to Fall Retention Data, 1993-1996

Year	MSU	GENS 101V Freshman Seminar	Undeclared Students No Seminar
1996	68%	71%	61%
1995	71%	70%	60%
1994	70%	71%	64%
1993	71%	76%	69%

North Dakota State University

The Institution and Its Students

North Dakota State University is a four-year, public, land-grant university enrolling 9,700 students. Graduate students comprise 10% of the student body. Approximately one-third of students live on campus; all first-year students under the age of 19 are required to live on campus. Over half of the student body are North Dakota residents, and the majority (86%) is traditional-aged.

The Course

Skills for Academic Success has been offered since 1991 and provides one hour of graded academic credit. Beginning in the fall of 1998, the course will be required of all first-year students. The average section enrolls 25 students. A variety of instructors including administrators, faculty, lecturers, and students affairs professionals teach the course.

Course goals are the following:

- Ease the transition for new students at North Dakota State
- Teach skills and techniques used by successful college students
- Introduce students to campus resources and governance
- Explore study techniques, time management, test taking, note taking, goal setting, wellness, stress management, and career orientation

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Research Design and Outcomes*

The research conducted at North Dakota State was designed to measure the impact of a mechanism to increase voluntary student participation in the academic advising process.

Impact on Academic Advising

In 14 sections of Skills for Academic Success taught during the fall semester of 1997, the course instructor served as the advisor for the students in the class. Concurrently, there were 18 sections of the course in which the instructor did not serve as the advisor. Advising sessions occurred two

weeks following completion of the course, and advisors were surveyed to determine the number of advisees who had voluntarily attended advising sessions. Results indicated that students whose instructor served the dual role of advisor voluntarily attended advising sessions significantly more often (chi square analysis, $p < .001$) than those assigned an advisor who was someone other than the instructor of their freshman seminar. Results of this study support the impact of continued student-advisor interaction within the seminar classroom setting on future willingness of students to contact advisers voluntarily.

*Complete results of this study may be obtained in the Spring 1998 issue of the *NACADA Journal*, Vol. 18, #1.

Northern Michigan University

The Institution and Its Students

Northern Michigan University (NMU), located in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, is a mid-sized, public university with a regional focus and a broad educational mission. NMU is primarily a commuter institution; only 24% of students reside on campus. The average age of the undergraduate student body is 24.2 years.

The Program

The key to the *First Year Experience (FYE) Program* at Northern Michigan is its focus on "blocks," learning communities comprised of three or more courses: a first-year seminar (UN 100) and two or more general education or major-specific courses. Participation in learning communities is optional, and maximum seminar class size is 25. (This group of 25 may become part of a larger number of students in the discipline-based classes.) UN 100 is letter-graded and taught primarily by full-time faculty members and their peer leaders. Blocked courses have been offered at NMU since the fall of 1995 and have been the subject of a number of quantitative and qualitative studies since that time.

Goals of UN 100 are as follows:

- To provide students with academic support and assistance
- To introduce students to and make them users of campus and community resources
- To encourage students to engage in career exploration or career confirmation activities
- To provide students with the personal/social support of peers, faculty, staff, and upperclass peer leaders

Research Design*

Using a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, UN 100 and the NMU blocks have been thoroughly studied since program inception in 1995. Results from perceptual, behavioral and course-related evaluation instruments as well as findings from focus-group discussion have been utilized primary for formative purposes to improve

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the curriculum and instructional techniques employed in the seminar. Summative evaluation includes outcomes of FYE Program participation with respect to grade point averages, academic standing, and retention.

Based on ACT and high school grade point averages, students participating in the First Year Experience Program are virtually identical to non-participants. Possible attitudinal, perceptual, and affective differences in participants and non-participants have been measured using the Student Orientation Survey. Findings are that participants and non-participants are also essentially the same with regard to their perceptions about their own abilities, traits, attitudes about the university, and expectations for both social and academic life at NMU.

Program Outcomes

Grade Point Average

There is little difference between the academic performance of the 1995, 1996, and 1997 first-time, full-time freshmen who did or did not participate in the program. This finding holds true on both immediate and long-term analysis (1995 data have been analyzed through five semesters, 1996 data through three semesters, and 1997 data for one semester).

Good Academic Standing

In spite of virtually no differences in grade point average, there is a distinct difference in the number and percentage of students staying in clear academic status (defined as a 2.0 GPA or higher). The difference at the end of the first semester for each cohort is statistically significant favoring FYE participants (77.8% vs. 67%); across the five semesters, it is apparent that more FYE students are in clear academic status than are non-FYE students (55.8% vs. 47.9%).

NMU finds that students' clear academic status at the end of the fifth semester is a strong predictor of their graduation. The data therefore strongly suggest that approximately 7% to 8% more FYE freshmen will graduate than will their non-FYE counterparts.

Retention

Retention data analyses are consistently in favor of the FYE student cohorts. Retention differences between FYE participants and non-participants vary across cohorts from 2% to 5% higher for FYE students.

**Research conducted by Paul Duby, Institutional Research, Northern Michigan University.*

Old Dominion University

The Institution and Its Students

Old Dominion University (ODU) is a public four-year institution located in Norfolk, VA. The institution enrolls approximately 18,000 students, slightly more than 12,000 of whom are undergraduates. The student body consists of 53% females and 47% males.

The Course

The freshman seminar at Old Dominion, entitled *University Orientation*, was founded in 1981. The course carries one academic credit and class size is limited to 25 students per section. Advisors in the University's Advising Services Office, as well as volunteers from other student services offices, teach University Orientation. It is an elective course for all first-year students except those who are identified as at-risk by virtue of lower SAT scores and/or high school grade point average; approximately 20% of entering first-year students are classified as at-risk and, thus, must take University Orientation at ODU.

The course is designed to assist students in achieving the following goals:

- Adjusting to the University
- Developing effective study skills
- Developing interpersonal skills
- Exploring major and career opportunities
- Becoming familiar with University resources

Research Design

In addition to relying on SAT scores and high school GPAs as predictors, all first-year students are administered a locally developed Freshman Survey during the summer orientation program. The Freshman Survey measures student attitudes, characteristics, and behaviors that have been associated with freshman academic difficulty and attrition in previous research. While students identified as at-risk by the Survey (approximately 12% of the freshman class each year) are not required to take University Orientation, it is strongly recommended to them.

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Research was done to assess what impact, if any, the University Orientation course has on the first-year academic performance and freshman-to-sophomore retention of at-risk students identified by the Freshman Survey. For analysis purposes, each of 114 at-risk students was classified into one of the following four subcategories:

- Students who took University Orientation and received additional counseling from their advisor
- Students who took University Orientation but did not receive additional counseling
- Students who did not take University Orientation but did receive additional counseling from their advisor
- Students who did not take University Orientation and did not receive individual counseling

Course Outcomes

Freshman Year Academic Performance

In terms of first-year academic performance, at-risk students who received the dual treatment of the University Orientation course and individual counseling fared the best. Within the dual treatment group, about three students in ten (29%) earned a GPA of less than 2.0 during their first year at Old Dominion. Those who were exposed to University Orientation only (40%) or counseling only (39%) were somewhat more likely than were students in the dual treatment group to experience academic difficulty. All treatment groups performed significantly better in their first year at the University than did at-risk students who did not receive either intervention; specifically, 65% of those who did not take part in either the course or individual counseling earned a GPA of less than 2.0 in their first year.

Freshman-to-Sophomore Retention

Students who received only the University Orientation course as treatment posted the highest freshman-to-sophomore retention rate (95%) among all of the analysis groups. This group was followed by the dual treatment group (84% retention) and the group that received only individual counseling (78% retention). Students who did not take University Orientation and did not receive counseling were retained at a rate of only 60%. It is interesting to note that students in both treatment groups that included the University Orientation course were retained at a better rate than were students in the ODU freshman class as a whole (72%).

Saginaw Valley State University

The Institution and Its Students

Saginaw Valley State University is a four-year public institution established in 1963. The institution enrolls 7,500 students, the majority of whom (5,600 students) are undergraduates. The campus is primarily a commuter campus, with only 10% of the student body living in residence halls.

The Course

In 1997, the University began offering a *College Success Course (CSC)* to entering students. The course was integrated as part of one of four regular course offerings: General Chemistry, Elements of Composition, Intermediate Algebra, and General Psychology. Adding CSC attached an additional credit hour to each course. For example, a regular section of General Psychology carries four credit hours, but when offered as a CSC section, it carries five credit hours. The College Success Course addressed a different subject each week such as learning and teaching styles, time management, computer literacy, note taking, test taking, and career exploration.

The CSC program was coordinated by senior members of the Divisions of Student Affairs and Student Services and Enrollment Management. Additionally, faculty members were involved in the development and implementation of the program.

Research Design

A research program was instituted for each CSC section and two corresponding non-CSC sections in each of the subject matter courses. For example, the CSC Psychology section was considered the experimental group, and the two other identical but non-CSC Psychology sections offered that semester were considered the control groups. The enrollment in the CSC sections was 104 students, and 140 students were enrolled in the eight non-CSC sections. The CSC and non-CSC sections were representative of the first-year class.

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Course/Program Outcomes

Retention and Grade Point Averages

The preliminary findings of the research program indicated that academic performance and retention of the CSC students were higher than either the non-CSC students and the first-year class as a whole. All CSC sections earned a 2.60 mean GPA while the non-CSC sections achieved a 2.37 GPA. The first-year class as a whole obtained a 2.49 GPA. Also, the retention rate for the winter semester for the CSC students was higher than either the non-CSC students and the first-year class as a whole. Ninety-two percent of the CSC students returned for the winter semester compared to 86% of the non-CSC students and 88% of the entire first-year class. The CSC sections had a lower withdrawal rate than the non-CSC sections of the courses.

Other Outcomes

Other positive outcomes have also been identified. Faculty members observed that the attendance rate for the CSC sections was higher than that of the non-CSC sections. Also, longitudinal studies (conducted at the beginning, midpoint, and end of the semester in each CSC and non-CSC section) indicated that the CSC students were more knowledgeable of University programs and services and used those resources with greater frequency than their non-CSC peers.

Salisbury State University

The Institution and Its Students

Salisbury State University is a comprehensive public institution enrolling 6,000 students in 36 undergraduate and graduate degree programs. Approximately 45% of the undergraduate population lives in residence halls on campus. Nearly 80% of all undergraduates are 24 and younger.

The Program

The New Student Experience at Salisbury State University has six components: University Visits, New Student Orientation, Orientation Seminar, Fall Convocation, Family Weekend, and Honors Convocation. The Orientation Seminar is designed to help new students achieve success in college. All new students and transfer students with fewer than 25 credits enroll in an orientation seminar in which they learn important academic skills, become aware of campus services and organizations, and develop supportive relationships with others in the campus community. Students select either an alternative, outdoor, or classroom orientation option. The Orientation Seminar is a pass/fail, one-credit hour course. No credit toward graduation is awarded for this course. Each Orientation Seminar is led by faculty, staff, and peer counselor volunteers.

Alternative orientation course options began in 1991 and have since expanded to include: Habitat for Humanity, Nursing, Team Teaching, Cultural Diversity, Arts, Eastern Shore Biology, Learning Community, Military Science, and Wildlife Biology. Generally, these alternative orientation courses take place during the weekends of the first semester and require an additional fee ranging from $20 to $175. Approximately 25% of the first-year students choose alternative orientation options.

Outdoor orientation options began in 1983 and have since expanded to include "total immersion" experiences such as canoeing in Canada, cycling in Maine, and sailing on the Chesapeake Bay. Generally, outdoor orientation options are 10 days long and take place before school begins in the fall. Additional fees ranging from $325 to $600 are required. Approximately 25% of the first-year students choose outdoor orientation options.

Classroom orientations have been available to new students since the 1970s. No extra fees are charged. Each student is assigned to a class section with a specific time to meet. Classroom orientations meet twice a week for the first five weeks of the semester. Approximately 50% of the first-year students choose the classroom orientation.

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Research Design

Researchers conducted a study examining the adjustment and retention differences of first-year students enrolled in alternative, outdoor, and classroom orientation programs using 576 first-year students who were enrolled in the Fall 1995 semester.

Program Outcomes

Adjustment

First year students were administered the College Transition Questionnaire (CTQ) following acceptance into college and prior to selecting and participating in an orientation option. Following the completion of all orientation options, the students were administered the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). The SACQ and CTQ are instruments which assess the level of a student's adjustment to the demands of college and the quality of that adjustment.

When the mean score of each CTQ adjustment area (academic, social, personal-emotional, institutional attachment and overall) was compared among the corresponding mean scores of the three orientation groups, no significant differences were found at the .01 level.

When SACQ scores were analyzed, outdoor enrollees yielded a higher mean score in each adjustment area when compared to alternative and classroom enrollees. Specifically, analysis of scores on the academic adjustment area showed no significant difference among the groups at $p < .01$. The social adjustment analysis yielded a significant difference among the groups $F(2, 274=11.18, p < .01)$. The Scheffe's test indicated that the alternative enrollees ($m = 121.9$) scored significantly lower than the outdoor enrollees ($m=139.6$) and the classroom enrollees ($m = 134.6$). The personal-emotional analysis showed no significant difference among the groups at $p < .01$. The institutional attachment analysis yielded a significant difference between the groups $F(2, 274=9.74, p < .01)$. The Scheffe's test indicated that alternative enrollees ($m=96.7$) scored significantly lower than the outdoor enrollees ($m=110.5$) and the classroom enrollees ($m=107.2$). The overall adjustment analysis yielded a significant difference between the groups $F(2, 274=7.04, p < .01)$. The Scheffe's test indicated that alternative enrollees ($m=414.2$) scored significantly lower than outdoor enrollees.

Retention

Second-semester and second-year retention rates were compared among the three orientation groups. Outdoor enrollees had the highest second semester retention rates in six of the last eight years.

University of Vermont

The Institution and Its Students

The University of Vermont is a public four-year institution with approximately 7,100 undergraduate students enrolled in seven colleges. The largest college, Arts and Sciences, enrolls about 3,500. The University is primarily residential and has a mostly traditional-aged student population. The majority of students are from the northeastern United States with a sizeable minority from other regions.

The Course/Program

About half of the first-year students enrolled in the College of Arts and Sciences take courses in the *Teacher-Advisor Program (TAP)*. TAP is an elective seminar and advising program that allows its students to choose either a year-long interdisciplinary, residential program (up to 18 credit hours) or a semester-long departmental seminar (three credit hours). Each course or program enrolls about 20 students and is taught by a tenured or tenure-track faculty member with expertise in the subject matter. This faculty member also becomes the students' academic advisor for the first year. Seminar topics encompass the social sciences, humanities, fine arts, and natural sciences.

In addition to mastering the subject matter of the course or program, students are able to develop critical and creative thinking, research, and oral and written communication skills. TAP aims to improve the quality of education by engaging its first-year students in an interactive scholarly community consisting of faculty and students with similar interests. It also aims to develop close relationships between faculty advisors and their advisees.

Research Design

The TAP program was evaluated by way of a longitudinal study that compared program participants with non-participants on the basis of GPA, retention, and honors recognition. The study included all students who entered the College of Arts and Sciences in the fall of 1997 and shows that TAP students, on average, were no different than their non-TAP counterparts in regard to their admissions ratings and SAT scores.

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Course/Program Outcomes

Academic Achievement

According to the descriptive statistics and the *t*-tests (at the 1% and 5% levels), TAP students had higher grade point averages and a higher percentage of students on the Dean's List than the non-participant group. Additionally, there were more TAP students than non-TAP students accepted into the University of Vermont's sophomore-through-senior year John Dewey Honors Program.

When comparing students within the TAP program, researchers found that students who elected to take the year-long interdisciplinary program rather than the semester-long seminar had the highest GPAs and had a higher rate of acceptance into honors studies. These students were also more likely than seminar students to make the Dean's List.

Retention

TAP students, when compared to first-year students not in the program, were found to have a higher freshman-to-sophomore retention rate. There were, however, no retention differences between year-long interdisciplinary and semester-long seminar students within the program.

West Texas A&M University

The Institution and Its Students

West Texas A&M University is a four-year public institution located in the panhandle of Texas. Established as a normal college in 1909, WTAMU joined the Texas A&M University System in 1990. The university has an enrollment of 6,500 students of whom 54% are traditional age and 46% are nontraditional. West Texas A&M consists of five academic colleges which house 59 undergraduate degrees and 32 graduate degrees.

The Course

The freshman seminar (IDS 101) at West Texas A&M University has been offered for 13 years. The course carries three hours of elective credit and is restricted to a maximum enrollment of 25 students in each section. The course is taught by faculty members, administrators, and student affairs staff. Each instructor is required to have a master's degree.

While the course carries elective credit, it is a requirement for some students. Students who do not meet admissions requirements or who fail a portion of the Texas Assessment of Skills Performance (TASP) test must register for and successfully complete IDS 101. Other students may also register for the seminar as an elective in their course of study.

Research Design*

During the 1996-97 academic year, West Texas A&M University studied the retention statistics of those students enrolled in the freshman seminar classes from 1991-1995. The students were subdivided into three groups:

1) Students who met university admission requirements but were placed in the seminar due to their ACT/SAT scores

2) Students who fell in the bottom half of the high school graduating class

3) Students who were individually approved by the Director of Admissions for special admission into the university

The study required enrollment numbers for each of the three groups, fall-to-fall retention data for general population students and for seminar students, persistence to graduation statistics for general population and

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seminar students, and long-term retention rates for seminar students. In addition, a 10-item questionnaire was mailed to 500 randomly selected students who had taken the seminar during the five-year period. Researchers also gathered information by creating focus groups and conducting individual interviews with former seminar students.

Course Outcomes

The research produced both encouraging and disappointing results regarding the effectiveness of the freshman seminar course at West Texas A&M University.

- The research showed that the retention rate of students who enrolled in the freshman seminar was almost double that of the general population students.
- Students enrolled in the freshman seminar course did not feel embarrassed or labeled by the requirement that they take the course.
- Students who took the class said they would recommend the course to other students.
- Students reported that the class enabled them to make friends; however, they did not credit the class with helping in their decision to stay in college, find jobs, or join organizations.
- Few students felt they had connected with a mentor as a result of the class.

Conclusions

The assessment of the data provided some important information for university administrators in decision-making positions. Currently, an action plan is being created to address the research findings. The recommendations involve the construction of a strategic plan for retaining freshmen, affirming institutional support for the freshman seminar, strengthening course development, and educating the administrative, faculty, and staff population about the integrated web of support services available to students at WTAMU.

*This research was funded, in part, by AASCU/Sallie Mae Technical Assistance Project.

Large Four-Year Institutions

Baruch College, CUNY
California State University, Long Beach
Northern Illinois University
Ohio University
San Diego State University
Texas A&M University
The University of Memphis
The University of Toledo
University of California, Santa Barbara
University of Maryland
University of South Carolina
Washington State University
Wright State University

Student Population over 12,500

Baruch College, CUNY

The Institution and Its Students

Baruch College is one of the several four-year campuses of the City University of New York. Baruch is located in Manhattan and serves over 14,000 commuter students. Fifty percent of these students come from families whose annual income is less than $20,000, and the majority of Baruch students are employed either part-time or full-time. Most Baruch students travel long distances to and from campus using public transportation.

The Course

The first-year seminar course at Baruch College is required for all students. The two sections that are the subject of this research were designed for 40 students enrolled in the *SEEK Program (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge)*. SEEK students are the most academically and economically disadvantaged students at CUNY campuses and are therefore considered to be the most at risk academically. The seminar instructor for these two sections was the SEEK counselor, and each class met once a week over the course of a semester. Syllabus topics included the following:

- Get-acquainted exercises
- Goal setting
- Using the library
- Time management
- Identifying sources of support
- Note-taking, listening, studying, and test taking
- Using the computer
- Health awareness
- Examining success vs. failure
- Financial aid
- Academic information for the next semester

The seminar course was followed by three reunions in subsequent semesters. These reunions served both an academic and social function, and they are the specific independent variable that is the subject of the research.

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Research Design* and Course Outcomes

To test the effectiveness of these reunions, the freshman seminar with reunions was compared to a seminar offered in the previous fall without reunions. The comparison of both attrition and academic performance was performed after six semesters.

Academic Performance

After six semesters, the mean GPA for the reunion group (2.51) was significantly higher than for the control group (2.37) at the .05 level. In addition, the reunion group had earned significantly more credit hours than the control group.

Retention

After six semesters only 10 students from the original 19 students in the control group were still in attendance. However, 18 of the 21 students in the reunion group remained after the same three year period. This difference was significant at the $p < .01$ level ($t = +2.38$).

Conclusions

While limited by small sample size and the uniqueness of the commuter population, this research nevertheless supports the possible value of class reunions for first-year seminar students. These reunions have the potential to extend the benefits of the seminar beyond one semester by furthering the students' academic and social integration into college.

*This summary was drawn from the following research article:

Anselmo, A. (1997). Is there life after freshman seminar? The case for the freshman seminar class reunion. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience & Students in Transition*, 9(1), 105-130.

California State University, Long Beach

The Institution and Its Students

California State, Long Beach is a regional comprehensive university with 26,000 students, the majority of whom are commuters. The University has an extraordinarily diverse student population, many of whom are first-generation college students.

The Course

University 100 has been offered at Cal State, Long Beach since 1981. It is a required, one-unit (15 hours) academic orientation to Western universities in general and Cal State, Long Beach in particular. The course is offered in three "modes" during the academic year: a pre-semester session which meets daily for three hours during the five days before each regular semester, an intensive session which meets all day for two weekend days at the beginning of the first semester, and an in-semester session which meets for three hours one day per week during the first five weeks of the semester. This course is offered in fall, winter, and summer sessions. The overwhelming majority of students enrolled in the course are first-year students; however a small percentage of upper-division students also enrolled during the years that were the subject of this research. Course content includes two components. The history and mission of higher education, curriculum issues, faculty and students' rights and responsibilities, and career planning comprise the in-class component. In addition, the course includes a self-instructed, self-paced library component which is completed outside of class time.

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Research Design*

University 100 was evaluated through (a) a narrative assessment completed by students in the 1992 cohort who had just taken the course, (b) a quantitative assessment by students who completed the course in 1991, and (c) a quantitative assessment by students in upper-division courses who took University 100 when admitted one to three years earlier.

Course Outcomes

Overall, students indicated, through narrative and qualitative evaluation methods, that course objectives had been met. Other research questions relate to timing of the course and effectiveness of the resources.

Timing of Course

In general the effectiveness of University 100 was very similar for all students, whether they were enrolled as new or more experienced students. However, University 100 helped the students feel more prepared for the university experience when it was taken as a new student.

Effectiveness of University 100 Resources

Juniors and seniors reported that the effectiveness of both instructors and classroom discussions was significantly higher than for the texts. Respondents indicated that the library skills component of the course was the most effective resource, but this effectiveness related less to the instructor than to the quality of the course material.

Additional Findings

Overall, respondents indicated that University 100 was extremely valuable when taken before or at the beginning of their college careers. The survey of juniors and seniors found that students still identified value in the course after having a more mature perspective on their university careers. Overall the narrative evaluations indicated a high degree of satisfaction and, in some cases, even life-changing experiences.

*This summary was drawn from the following research article:

Hanley, G., & Olson, S. (1996). Preparing incoming students for the university educational process: From the students' perspective and retrospective. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience & Students in Transition, 8*(1), 47-77.

Northern Illinois University

The Institution and Its Students

Northern Illinois University is a public, four-year institution with approximately 23,000 students. Northern Illinois is primarily residential and suburban. The students are generally traditional-aged, although the enrollment of non-traditional undergraduates is growing.

The Course

Introduction to University Studies (ICPS 101) has been offered at Northern Illinois since 1987. The course was originally designed for health science students, but is now offered to all first-year students. Currently, none of the sections is linked to a specific college. As an elective, ICPS 101 carries one hour of academic credit and enrolls a maximum of 20 students in each section. Faculty and support staff teach the course.

Course goals are the following:

- Promote the establishment of relationships between peers and the instructor
- Provide enriching out-of-class activities and assignments
- Facilitate students' learning about the university and about their interests, abilities, and expectations in relation to their chosen field of study

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Research Design*

A study was conducted to investigate the effects of a first-year orientation program on grade performance and persistence of students in the College of Health and Human Sciences. The study compared course participants and non-participants in the 1987 through 1991 Health and Human Sciences cohorts. These five consecutive first-year cohorts totaled 1,210 students, of whom 312 took the course and 898 did not.

Course Outcomes

Retention

Researchers found that 74.4% of the students who took ICPS 101 returned to the university for the fall semester of their second year while 66.3% of the students who did not take the course returned for their second year of college. The persistence rate of the students who took the course was significantly higher than for non-participants ($X^2 = 7.02$, $F = 1$, $p < .01$).

Grade Performance

After controlling for differences between the two groups on the ACT Composite score, students who took the orientation course earned significantly higher mean first semester GPAs (2.60) than students who did not take the course (2.28) [$F(1.485) = 6.64$, $p < .01$]. Researchers found similar results for grade performance after two semesters. After accounting for ACT score differences, findings revealed that students who took the course had a higher mean first-year GPA (2.65) than students who did not take the course (2.40) [$F(1,437) = 4.08$, $p < .05$].

Based on the demonstrated positive effects of the freshman orientation course for health sciences students, a university-wide committee approved the expansion of the course for all new freshmen at the university.

**This summarizes a full research report authored by J. Daniel House, Office of Institutional Research, Sandra J. Kuchynka, College of Health and Human Sciences, and Beiling L. Xiao, Office of Institutional Research at Northern Illinois University. This report was presented at the May 1997 Association for Institutional Research Forum in Orlando, Florida and is available from the authors upon request.*

Ohio University

The Institution and Its Students

Ohio University is a four-year public university located in the foothills of southeastern Ohio. The campus is residential, with fewer than five percent of students commuting. The student body includes approximately 16,000 undergraduates who are primarily traditional-aged. Students are quite diverse in terms of ethnicity and national origin. All 50 states and more than 100 countries are represented by the undergraduate and graduate student population at Ohio University.

The Course

University Experience, first offered in 1978, is designed as an extended orientation course for first-quarter students. In addition to fostering development of a peer support network among students, the course also aims to enhance student success by addressing these topics:

- Academic skills
- Academic policies and procedures
- Education and career planning
- Cross-cultural and racial understanding

Although University Experience is open to students in all nine of Ohio University's undergraduate colleges, this elective course tends to attract a disproportionately high number of undecided majors from the University College. Students receive a letter grade and two credit hours for taking the course. University Experience is taught on a voluntary basis by non-faculty administrators from both academic affairs and student affairs; graduate students and undergraduate peer leaders assist with course instruction. Class size is limited to 20 students per section.

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Research Design

A quantitative analysis was done to determine what effect, if any, enrollment in University Experience has on first-year students. Specifically, course participants and non-participants were compared with regard to the following three variables: first-year grade point average, retention, and graduation rates. Comparison groups were controlled for differ-

ences in aptitude and prior academic performance as determined by ACT scores and high school class percentile rank. Participants are first-quarter, first-year, degree-seeking students in the ten classes that entered Ohio University from 1986 to 1995.

Course Outcomes

Analysis of the data reveal the following general findings:

- Those who took University Experience tended to earn higher grade point averages in their first year than did students who did not take this course.
- Although the difference was slight, over the ten-year period studied, the average retention rate among students who took University Experience was one percentage point higher than it was among first-year students who did not take the course.
- Four-, five-, and six-year graduation rates tended to be higher for students who enrolled in the course than for students who did not take the course. For example, among students in the entering class of 1991, the four-year graduation rate for course participants was 51.6% versus 45.7% for non-participants.

San Diego State University

The Institution and Its Students

San Diego State University, a four-year public university of 28,000 students, is part of the California State University system and offers degree programs at the baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral levels. A significant number of Hispanic, African-American, and Asian-American students are part of the student population. The University is primarily a commuter campus with the number of non-traditional students growing.

The Program

The *Freshman Success Programs (FSP)* at San Diego State University have been offered for five years with three options: 1) the University Seminar only; 2) the Integrated Curriculum, which includes the University Seminar; or 3) the Living Learning Center, which includes the Integrated Curriculum and the University Seminar.

The University Seminar consists of a one-unit, credit/no credit course that is offered to first semester freshmen only. The class size is from 10 to 13 and the course is taught by faculty, staff, and administrators. The intent of this class is to introduce freshmen to the university environment and culture. Students can sign up for this class only or can take it as a component of the Integrated Curriculum or Living Learning Center.

The Integrated Curriculum component of the Freshman Success Programs (FSP) simultaneously enrolls blocks of students in a required three-unit general education class; a companion three-unit course (such as a freshman composition course); a one-unit, no credit study group; and University Seminar.

The Living Learning Center (LLC) component brings together the Integrated Curriculum and two residence halls that are designated the Living Learning Center. In the LLC, students take classes together and enjoy all the benefits of living in a campus residence hall. Features of the program include in-hall computer labs, faculty mentoring, faculty in residence, Integrated Curriculum with University Seminar, community assistants, and tutoring/study groups.

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Research Design* and Program Outcomes

Retention and Academic Achievement

Researchers found that freshmen involved in the FSP are less likely to be on probation than non-FSP freshmen. When compared with non-FSP participants, FSP participants are more likely to have higher GPAs and more likely to return the following spring semester. A multiple regression analysis revealed that, even after relevant control variables (such as incoming high school GPAs and SAT scores) are accounted for, the effects of the FSP on the probability of being on probation, grade point average, and retention are statistically (at .001 level) as well as substantively significant.

Other Outcomes

In the fall of 1997, focus groups were surveyed to obtain attitudinal and experiential data from freshmen involved in the Freshman Success Programs. The University Seminar portion of the FSP was targeted for analysis. Students from three components of the FSP (stand-alone sections of University Seminar; sections connected with the Integrated Curriculum; and sections connected with the Living Learning Center) were randomly selected for inclusion in the focus groups. The focus groups were videotaped and analyzed. The students told how University Seminar helped them make the transition from high school to college and how it helped them adapt to the huge size of SDSU. Students from less privileged backgrounds, who were often the first in their family to attend college, were especially grateful for University Seminar.

*Research conducted and original report prepared by:

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Texas A&M University

The Institution and Its Students

Texas A&M University, the flagship institution for the Texas A&M University System, is a four-year public land, sea, and space grant institution. In addition to ten colleges that offer hundreds of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral degrees, the university houses both medical and veterinary medicine colleges. Texas A&M enrolls approximately 42,000 students and offers on-campus housing to over 10,000 students.

The Course

Center for Academic Enhancement (CAEN) 101, *Succeeding In College*, is a two credit study skills course offered during the fall, spring, and summer terms at Texas A&M. CAEN 101 is offered by the Center for Academic Enhancement (CAE), a department under the Associate Provost for Academic Programs and Undergraduate Services. Instructors for the course include lecturers employed by CAE or faculty and staff from other departments such as athletics, the general studies program, and the College of Architecture.

Enrollment in the course requires the recommendation of an academic advisor. The course is intended for new students; however, others who have experienced academic difficulties may also enroll with the recommendation of their advisors. The six main content areas covered in CAEN 101 include campus resources, communication skills, dealing with test anxiety, note taking, reading, and time management.

CAEN 101 was first offered during the Fall 1992 semester. The course paralleled a two-credit course titled Educational Psychology (EPSY) 101, which had served as a study skills course at the university since the 1960s. In 1995, due to resource constraints, EPSY 101 was discontinued. While CAEN 101 and EPSY 101 experienced a short term of coexistence, CAEN 101 is now the only study skills course offered at Texas A&M.

Research Design

This study looked at CAEN 101 and EPSY 101 to identify the grade point averages and retention rates for first-semester freshmen in each course and then compared these rates to all university averages. The intent was to determine if and how the retention rate was affected by participation in the selected study skills courses. The data were analyzed by academic

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college and also by the demographic variables of gender and ethnicity. The treatment group consisted of all first-semester freshmen in each course for the Fall 1992, 1993, and 1994 semesters. Measurement of GPA and retention was conducted at one year and two year points.

Course Outcomes

Grade Point Average

One- and two-year analysis of GPA indicated that students in CAEN had the lowest GPA, followed by EPSY 101, and the university freshman population. After two years, the GPA of students in CAEN 101 (2.598) was significantly lower ($p < .05$) than the university population group (2.766), while the GPA of EPSY 101 (2.707) was not significantly different from either group.

Retention

After one year, both CAEN 101 (85.2%) and EPSY 101 (85.8%) had retention rates that were comparable to the University freshman average (85.7%). After two years, the retention rates of students in the two study skills courses continued to resemble the University freshman average of 80.4%. CAEN 101 students had a retention rate of 78.1% and students in EPSY 101 had a retention rate of 82.4%.

Gender

Female students as a group had higher grades than their male counterparts in all groups. There was no significant difference in retention based on gender.

Ethnicity

Analysis by ethnic category indicated significant differences between ethnic groups both in GPA and rate of retention, but the relative rankings varied within groups so no single conclusion concerning ethnicity was substantiated by the data.

Conclusions

The importance of these findings are not necessarily obvious until it is noted that the students in the two courses under study had significantly lower admissions test scores than the university average. Additionally, students in these courses were perceived to be at some degree of academic risk by the academic advisors who recommended their enrollment, and yet achieved retention and GPA outcomes comparable to first-year students as a whole.

The University of Memphis

The Institution and Its Students

The University of Memphis is a four-year, state-supported institution that enrolls approximately 20,000 students in its undergraduate and graduate divisions each year. The University is a predominately regional institution; 80% of the student body comes from within a 50 mile radius of Memphis. However, all 50 states are represented in the university's enrollment, and the student body is showing an increasing international presence.

The majority of undergraduate students are traditional age (67% are 22 and under); however, the number of nontraditional age students is rising each semester. The undergraduate population is 54% female and 46% male. The University of Memphis is a predominantly White institution, but concerted efforts have been made to increase numbers of underrepresented minorities, specifically Black students. Currently, 29% of the undergraduate student population is Black.

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The Course

Implemented in 1990, *ACAD 1100 (Introduction to the University)* has two purposes: (a) to improve student performance and retention and (b) to provide students with an extensive introduction to the purposes of higher education in general and to the expectations, demands, and resources of The University of Memphis in particular. The three-credit graded course is designed specifically for freshmen and is limited to 25 students per section. Each section is taught by specially trained faculty, student affairs personnel, and administrators who have been highly recommended as being student-oriented.

For the general student body, ACAD 1100 is used primarily as a general elective which counts toward graduation requirements. There are several populations of students, however, for whom the course is a requirement. These populations include students in leadership and scholarship programs, students participating in the residence life program (Freshman First Experience), athletic scholarship students, students with learning disabilities, and freshmen with admission scores indicating the need for reading and study skills. Several restricted sections are also offered for students participating in the honors program and for nontraditional students and returning adults.

Course topics and material revolve around survival skills and cognitive development. Survival skills include career counseling, academic

advising, study skills, time management, and stress management. The course also addresses the purpose of a university education. It offers a mix of skills training and discussion of issues and ideas. Both aspects of the course (survival skills and cognitive development) require that students develop and practice writing, reading, analysis, evaluation, and critical thinking skills.

Research Design

Since the course began in 1990, both quantitative and qualitative evaluations have been used to assess each section of the course. A longitudinal study has been in place since the beginning, as well, to assess long-term overall course impact.

Each semester, ACAD participants are given two surveys which address student satisfaction with the course and faculty achievement in teaching the course. The satisfaction survey provides information about the students' needs and whether or not those needs are being met. The faculty achievement survey provides information about the content of the course and the degree to which that content is addressed by the faculty member.

The longitudinal study compares the self-selected participants and non-participants each year on the basis of gender, ethnicity, full-time/part-time status, and ACT scores. Logistic regression is used to assess year-to-year persistence for these students. Within the context of multiple regression, the impact of ACAD on college GPA is also assessed. Variables include social background, ability/achievement, and college experience.

Course Outcomes

Student Satisfaction and Faculty Achievement

The two quantitative and qualitative evaluations administered to course participants each semester indicate an overall 95% success rate for both student satisfaction and faculty achievement.

Retention

Findings from the longitudinal study indicate that students who participate in ACAD persist to their second year at a significantly higher rate ($p = .006$) than those students who do not take the course. On average, 82% of those enrolled in the course persist as compared to 73% of non-participants.

As the longitudinal study shows, this difference is not due to characteristics of a group of participants who are unrepresentative of the entire student population. The ACAD students are representative of the total freshman population in terms of gender, ethnicity, full-time/part-time status, and ACT scores.

Academic Achievement

Each year they are in school, ACAD students have higher GPAs than those students who do not participate ($p < .01$).

The University of Toledo

The Institution and Its Students

The University of Toledo is an urban university of approximately 20,000 students, 16,000 of whom are undergraduates. Most of the students (80%) are commuters and about half the population is of traditional age.

The Course

First-Year Information (FYI) is a course required for all first-year students at the University. For most students, FYI meets once weekly and carries one semester hour of academic credit. (The FYI course as it is designed for students in the Colleges of Education and Engineering carries two and three semester hours respectively.) The primary course goal is the positive assimilation of students into the university environment. Topics for class sessions include study skills, time management, computer literacy, library skills, career exploration, cultural diversity, and academic planning. The course is taught by faculty, student affairs professionals, and campus administrators. Since 1994, the course has been housed in the Enrollment Management Division. As of Fall 1998, FYI will be administered by Academic Affairs.

Research Design*

Since FYI is a required course for all Toledo students, no control group exists to permit comparisons of participants and non-participants. Therefore evaluation has focused on the course components, the peer mentoring program, a videotape series, and printed classroom resources. Surveys were administered to FYI instructors, peer mentors, directors of student services who participated in the programming, and students. The results summarized in this publication will focus on student reactions. A full report of findings can be obtained from Dr. Andrew Jorgensen, Assistant Vice President for Academic Affairs.

Research Outcomes

Most Effective Course Components

Over 70% of students indicated that the following course components were valuable:

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Academic advising - 75%. (Especially students in Colleges of Education and Pharmacy)

Use of campus support services - 74%. (Especially students in Education and Business Administration)

Career exploration - 79%. Researchers note that this level of satisfaction for the career exploration component of the course is higher than in previous years.

Goal setting and time management - 75%. Researchers observe that interest in these topics is high among new college students.

Peer mentoring program - 73%. The attitudes of new students about the role and importance of the peer mentor has improved over previous years.

Less Effective Course Components

Less than 55% of students indicated that the following course components were valuable or effective:

Awareness of cultural diversity - 53%. Researchers observed that low faculty comfort with teaching this topic is likely the reason that fewer students responded favorably to it. College of Education students reported the highest level of satisfaction (69%) and College of Engineering students, the lowest (26%).

Study skills - 50%. Given this comparatively unfavorable reaction to study skills instruction, researchers conclude that a way must be found to deliver this important information that is more appealing to students.

Library instruction - 54%. Findings indicate that student satisfaction with the library component of FYI has been consistently low during the past four years of the program. However, because of its importance, library instruction will continue to be a component of the FYI course.

Use of video tapes - 44%. The University created videotapes to serve as a supplement to guest speakers or as introductions to campus services. Tapes were distributed to all instructors; however, not all instructors used the tapes in the classroom. The low level of student satisfaction with the tapes is thought to be an indication of their lack of use rather than an actual negative comment on their value.

Conclusions

By gathering yearly survey data from instructors, student course assistants (peer leaders), and students, The University of Toledo has built a body of evidence that can be used to improve the FYI program as needed. Such research is recommended for every program, but is especially useful in institutions where the seminar is required for all students and no control group exists for objective comparison of outcomes.

**Research conducted and original report prepared by Tracy R. Barton, Doctoral Student, The University of Toledo.*

University of California, Santa Barbara

The Institution and Its Students

The University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB) is a four-year public research university enrolling approximately 18,500 undergraduates. The vast majority (97%) of undergraduates live in university residence halls and are enrolled in one of three undergraduate colleges: Letters and Science (the largest), Engineering, and Creative Studies (the smallest college offering a "graduate school-like" experience to a small number of exceptional students). Most students (95.3%) are California residents, but the student population is racially and ethnically diverse (64% White, 17% Asian/Pacific Islander, 13% Chicano/Latino, 3% Black, 2% "Other," and 1% Native American). UCSB is a selective institution, and in 1998-99, entering students, on average, had high school GPAs of 3.65 and SAT scores of 1162.

The Course

UCSB offers a freshman experience course called *Introduction to the University (Interdisciplinary Studies 20)*. This letter-graded course carries three quarter hours of academic credit and enrolls from 150-200 students each spring quarter. Athletes and students determined to be at risk are strongly encouraged to enroll; however, the course is not a requirement for any group of new students. Interdisciplinary Studies 20 is characterized as an academic seminar. Although the undergraduate dean of the college is the instructor-of-record, student affairs professionals and a small number of graduate students serve as the teaching assistants. Two upper-division students are also assigned to each class to work as peer mentors.

The seminar meets once a week for three hours; half the time is spent in large group lectures presented by a series of guest lecturers (faculty and staff), and half in small discussion sections. Lecture/discussion topics include the following:

- The nature of a research institution
- Roles of faculty, staff, and students in a community of scholars
- Importance of critical thinking
- Impact of cultural/ethnic diversity on a scholarly community
- Student development theory

Assignments include two critical analysis papers, weekly written critiques of the readings, and attendance at four campus events ranging from study skills workshops to political debates to dance performances.

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Research Design*

This dissertation study compared participants and non-participants in the freshman experience course to determine the course impact on academic and social integration as well as retention. Both in-depth qualitative interviews (n = 32) and surveys (n = 788) were used to assess changes in student experiences and perceptions prior to and following the course. A variety of statistical procedures—including factor analysis, analysis of variance and logistic regression—were used to analyze the data.

Course Outcomes

Academic and Social Integration

Students who participated in the freshman experience course differ from the non-participant control group on the following variables at the .05 level of significance:

- Participants experienced less decline in their feelings of satisfaction with their social experience and sense of belonging.
- They were more likely to attend campus events.
- They spoke to their instructors out of class more often.
- They experienced less decline in their satisfaction with campus services.
- They were more likely to ask instructors for help with homework.
- They were more likely to attend study skills and library workshops.
- They were more likely to join honors programs or participate in student government.
- They felt that faculty were more interested in students.

Retention

Research results also showed that the course had a positive influence on retention to the sophomore year for both genders and all ethnicities. Overall, 90% of the students in the non-participant control group were retained versus 95% of the participant treatment group (Chi-square test of independence: p = .03; Cramer's V = .03). However, it was unclear as to what aspect(s) of the course experience contributed to this effect.

Conclusions

This study suggests that freshman experience programs have value in helping students understand the nature of their personal integration process and encouraging the kinds of activities and behaviors that support social and academic integration.

*This summarizes the following dissertation:

Andreatta, B. (1997). *The effects of social and academic integration on the retention of first year university students: A quantitative and qualitative survey.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara.

University of Maryland

The Institution and Its Students

The University of Maryland is a Carnegie Research I institution enrolling over 32,000 students (both residential and commuter) on its College Park campus located between the cities of Washington, DC and Baltimore, MD. Currently, 32.3% of College Park students are members of racial or ethnic minority groups.

The Course

EDCP 108-O, The Student in the University, has been offered to entering first-year students since 1986. The course carries one semester hour of academic credit and is taught by faculty, student affairs professionals, academic administrators, and students—both graduate and undergraduate. Currently the course enrolls approximately 1,450 students in sections of 25 students each.

Course goals include the following:

- To foster a sense of commitment to academic and personal development
- To assist students in defining the role that higher education will play in their lives
- To assist students in being accountable to the pursuit of their goals
- To help students explore the university and become involved
- To empower students and help them assess their strengths and areas of needed growth

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Research Design*

The purpose of this research was to determine the effects of the freshman orientation course (EDCP 108-O) on the two-year retention and good academic standing (maintaining at least a 2.0 GPA) of participants, while controlling for the volunteer effect.

Students who attended summer orientation in the summer of 1996 were

introduced to the freshman seminar and asked to indicate their interest in enrolling. From the entire freshman population, 240 students indicated an interest in taking the course. From that group, 77 students were randomly selected for the course (experimental group), and 80 students who were not selected were assigned to the control group. Both experimental and control groups were tracked for two years (Fall 1986 through Spring 1988). A separate analysis was conducted to compare retention rates in good academic standing for Black freshmen who did and did not participate in the course.

Course Outcomes

Retention in Good Academic Standing

Research indicated that the experimental group had significantly higher rates of retention in good academic standing for a two-year period than the control group.

Rates of Retention in Good Academic Standing

	Experimental (n = 72)	Control (n = 75)	X^2	p
Fall 1986	79%	63%	3.84	.025
Spring 1987	85%	64%	6.79	.004
Fall 1987	79%	66%	2.58	.05
Spring 1988	74%	59%	2.95	.04

Retention in Good Academic Standing of Black Students

Separate data analyses for Black students confirmed that participation in the seminar was also positively correlated with improved rates of retention in good academic standing over the same two-year period.

*This summary was drawn from the following research article:

Strumpf, G., & Hunt, P. (1993). The effects of an orientation course on the retention and academic standing of entering freshmen, controlling for the volunteer effect. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience*, 5(1), 7-14.

University of South Carolina

The Institution and Its Students

The University of South Carolina (USC) is a research university with a student population of approximately 26,000. The overwhelming majority of first-year students are of traditional age, and most first-year students live on campus. Approximately 20% of the undergraduate student population is comprised of African-American students. There are no other sizable groups of minority students at the undergraduate level. Slightly over 80% of students are from South Carolina.

The Course

University 101 is a three-semester hour course which is optional for first-year students, except those enrolling in the Colleges of Business and Engineering. Business and Engineering majors are required to take a discipline-linked version of University 101. Offered since 1972, this course is taught currently in 105 sections of approximately 20 students each by a mix of faculty, student affairs professionals, academic administrators, as well as graduate and upper-level undergraduate students who serve as co-teachers or "peer leaders."

University 101 is a letter-graded course; some course components are required for all sections, but instructors are given significant latitude in determining class topics and activities. Overall course objectives are to improve the transition experience for first-year students and to introduce them to the joint concepts of freedom and responsibility in college life.

Research Design*

Since 1973, University 101 has been the focus of a number of research projects, especially investigating the relationship of the course to improved student retention. This study, however, focuses on the joint influence of participation in University 101 and living on campus.

Eight successive cohorts (1986-1993) of entering full-time freshmen at USC were tracked to the sophomore year. Living on or off campus versus participating or not participating in University 101 were examined separately and together for their effect on freshman dropout rates.

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Research Outcomes

Retention

Both living on campus and participating in University 101 increased the likelihood that students would be retained to the sophomore year. Students living on campus achieved significantly lower dropout rates than students living off campus for each cohort studied. Students participating in University 101 had significantly lower dropout rates than non-participants in seven of eight cohorts and tended to have a lower rate in the other cohort as well.

When both factors, campus residence and University 101 participation, were examined together, freshmen who lived on campus and took the course showed the lowest average dropout rate for the eight years studied (14.4%). The average eight-year dropout rate for on-campus students who did not take University 101 was 17.3%. The overall difference between 14.4% and 17.3% was statistically significant at $p < .01$. For freshmen living off campus, University 101 participants showed a lower dropout rate (20.7%) than non-participants (25.4%) ($p < .01$).

*This summary was drawn from the following research article:

Fidler, P., & Moore, P. (1996). A comparison of effects of campus residence and freshman seminar attendance on freshman dropout rates. *Journal of The Freshman Year Experience & Students in Transition, 8*(2), 7-16.

Washington State University

The Institution and Its Students

Washington State University is a four-year, public, moderately selective land grant institution. The campus in Pullman is primarily residential and has a student enrollment of 16,500. Students are primarily traditional-aged, European American, and in-state residents. Washington State requires all freshman to live in on-campus housing and enrolls all students in a comprehensive General Education Program before they begin their major course of study.

The Program

The Freshman Seminar Program at Washington State is a learning community consisting of two linked courses: a general education or introductory course and a freshman seminar. The current program, first offered in the fall of 1996, combined two programs that had been in existence since 1990 and 1991. The program's mission is to bring together new and continuing students and faculty members in a collaborative, intellectually challenging environment where new students will be supported in becoming successful members of the academic community.

The freshman seminar is a two-credit elective course with a maximum section enrollment of 20 students. Currently, one-quarter of the freshman class (about 550 students) participates each year. Each seminar is led by an upperclass peer facilitator who receives pre-service and weekly orientations from a graduate facilitator. In addition, the faculty member who teaches the linked general education or introductory course is scheduled to visit the seminar class four times during the semester to teach the students about disciplinary research, writing methods, and related issues. Highly skilled undergraduate "hypernauts" (learning through technology consultants) are also assigned to each section to assist the students as they interact in the university's web-based learning environments.

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Research Design

In order to assess students' perspectives and performance, Freshman Seminar administrators use a number of qualitative and quantitative research instruments. One such instrument, the College Student Experiences Questionnaire (CSEQ), is a self-report survey administered to second semester freshmen. It is used to gauge the students' perspectives

on their college experiences. Another instrument is the Flashlight Survey which is administered to the students twice each semester to assess their experiences with the seminar itself. Administrators also conduct summative evaluations of the program in which they compare the grades and retention rates of seminar participants and non-participants.

Program Outcomes

Findings from the various instruments and methods employed by Washington State indicate that students find the seminars helpful academically and socially; that students who take the seminar perform as well as and, in most cases, better than students with similar pre-college academic preparation; and that seminar students are retained from their freshman to sophomore year at a higher rate than non-seminar students.

Perceived Skill Attainment

The 1996 Flashlight Survey results indicate (and are supported by subsequent surveys) that seminar participants, as compared to non-participants, are more likely to feel that they have learned to:

- Manage large complex tasks
- Work through a process to solve problems
- Ask for clarification about academic work
- Exercise creativity
- Gain confidence in attaining academic goals
- Better understand subject matter
- Perform tasks to be faced in their professions
- Appreciate diversity of opinions and cultures

Quality of Involvement

Findings from the 1997 CSEQ suggest that seminar participants are more likely than non-participants to become actively engaged in their learning, cooperate with other students, have contact with faculty, and gain the capacity for lifelong learning. Seminar students were significantly ($p < .05$) more likely to read more than other students, read basic references or documents, gain familiarity with computers, and gain specialization to further their education.

Retention

Students who enrolled in the freshman seminar in 1996 were nearly five percent more likely than non-participants to be retained between their freshman and sophomore years.

Academic Achievement of At-Risk Students

The cumulative grades of Fall 1996 academically at-risk seminar participants were nearly a full grade point higher ($p = .003$) than at-risk students not enrolled in the program. The difference in grades, while still positive, was slightly smaller for the Fall 1997 at-risk student population.

Wright State University

The Institution and Its Students

Wright State University, a four-year public institution, is located 12 miles northeast of Dayton, OH. The university has an enrollment of approximately 16,000 students. Fifty percent of entering freshmen live on campus. Wright State offers about 100 undergraduate majors and 40 graduate and professional degree programs.

The Course

First Year Student Seminar at Wright State University has been offered to students since 1984. This elective course carries two hours of academic credit and has a maximum section enrollment of 20 students. The seminar is taught primarily by academic advisors from the Academic Advising Center in Wright State's University Division.

The primary goals of the seminar are as follows:

- Better understanding of the many aspects of wellness
- Better understanding of the benefits of a college education and active involvement in college activities
- Better understanding of personal interests, skills, and values in relation to life/career planning issues
- Better understanding of academic and other university rules, regulations, and procedures
- Being able to locate and utilize a variety of academic success skills and strategies
- Understanding and appreciating the issues and value of diversity

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Research Design

Researchers tracked all new students (N = 1,913) who enrolled in the fall of 1996 through the fall of 1997 in order to make an overall comparison. Of these 1,913 students, 507 (26.5%) enrolled in the seminar while the remaining 1,406 (73.5%) did not. The retention rates of participants and

non-participants were compared for the 1997 winter, spring, and fall quarters. The two groups were also compared on the basis of math placement scores, ACT/SAT scores, university GPA, and high school GPA.

Additionally, researchers at Wright State conducted a matched study. They wanted to compare university GPA and retention of students enrolled in the seminar to a group of non-participants with similar backgrounds. Students were matched based on the following criteria: sex, race (Black, non-Black), math placement score, ACT (by one of four quartiles), and high school GPA (by one of three categories). Four hundred and seventeen of the students enrolled in the seminar were matched with similar students not enrolled in the course. Students in the two groups were similar in other respects, including intended major and enrollment status.

Course Outcomes

Retention

For all three academic quarters (winter, spring and fall of 1997), students who were enrolled in the Fall 1996 seminar were retained at a higher rate (t = -2.55, p = .01). Ninety-five percent of the seminar participants were still enrolled at Wright State during the 1997 winter quarter, while only 88% of non-participants were enrolled. The seminar group had retention rates of 90% and 72% for the spring and fall quarters respectively. For these same quarters, non-participants had retention rates of 81% and 65%.

At the end of the three quarters, retention rates for the matched students were compared. In the Fall 1997 quarter, 72.4% of the seminar students in the matched study were retained, while the retention rate of the matched non-participants was 64.3%.

University Grade Point Average

After the 1997 spring quarter, the average university GPA for seminar participants was 2.24 while the GPA for non-participants was 2.33. Just as the matched groups were compared for retention, researchers also investigated their differences as related to GPA. The average GPA at the end of three quarters was 0.06 points higher for participants than for non-participants. This, however, is not a statistically significant difference.